



NATIONAL VETERANS  
ART MUSEUM

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TRIENNIAL  
VETERAN ART SUMMIT

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*ON WAR & SURVIVAL*

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Exhibition: May 3, 2019 - July 29, 2019  
Summit: May 3, 2019 - May 5, 2019

RESOURCE GUIDE

# NATIONAL VETERANS ART MUSEUM TRIENNIAL & VETERAN ART SUMMIT RESOURCE GUIDE

With a focus on the visual, literary, performative and creative practices of veterans, the National Veterans Art Museum Triennial explores a century of war and survival while challenging the perception that war is something only those who have served in the military can comprehend. Throughout history, art has provided a frame to create meaning out of the complicated experience of war, seek justice and imagine reconciliation. The National Veterans Art Museum (NVAM) Triennial draws on this history to connect today's veteran artists with the history of veteran creative practices and their impact on society over the past century.

The NVAM Triennial exhibition opening coincides with the inaugural Veteran Art Summit, which features a series of presentations, workshops, panels and discussions, held at the Chicago Cultural Center, DePaul Art Museum and National Veterans Art Museum.

This supplementary newspaper includes essays and descriptions of the Triennial exhibitions, the performance program, the literature component, an education guide and an overview of the Veteran Art Summit.

## SUPPORT NVAM

Visit [NVAM.ORG](http://NVAM.ORG) to become a member, make a donation, or volunteer to support the work of this important and unique veteran art institution. The NVAM depends on contributions from people like you to realize its mission.

*The National Veterans Art Museum inspires greater understanding of the impact of war. The museum collects, preserves and exhibits art inspired by combat and created by veterans.* – NVAM Mission

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## RESOURCE GUIDE

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All the many more hard working people, donors, & sponsors that helped make the first NVAM Triennial & Veteran Art Summit possible.

## SPONSORS & PARTNERS



Richard Harris Art Collection

# VENUES, EXHIBITIONS, & PROGRAMS

## CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER | [chicago.gov](http://chicago.gov)

### *MAKING MEANING*

Curated by Aaron Hughes with support from UIC Museum & Exhibition Studies students

### *CONVERGENCE*

Curated by Yvette Pino with support from UIC Museum & Exhibition Studies students

### *CONFLICT EXCHANGE*

Curated by Ian Alden Russell with support from UIC Museum & Exhibition Studies students

### *VETERAN MOVEMENTS*

Curated by UIC Museum & Exhibition Studies students with support from Aaron Hughes

### *RETURN TO THE BODY* (Performance Program)

Curated by Carlos Sirah with support from UIC Museum & Exhibition Studies students

## DEPAUL ART MUSEUM | [artmuseum.depaul.edu](http://artmuseum.depaul.edu)

### *ERIC J. GARCIA: THE BALD EAGLE'S TOUPEE*

Curated by Julie Rodrigues Widholm & Mia Lopez

## NATIONAL VETERANS ART MUSEUM | [nvam.org](http://nvam.org)

### *OPEN/CLOSED*

Curated by Amber Hoy with support from UIC Museum & Exhibition Studies students

## NVAM TRIENNIAL RESOURCE GUIDE

### *RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH* (Literature Component)

Curated by Kevin Basl with support from UIC Museum & Exhibition Studies students

### *TRIENNIAL EDUCATION GUIDE*

Organized by Edgar Gonzalez-Baeza with support from UIC Museum & Exhibition Studies students

# NVAM TRIENNIAL CURATOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Aaron Hughes** is the NEH/NVAM *Dialogues on the Experience of War* Director and Triennial Lead Curator, and curator of the Triennial Exhibitions *Making Meaning* and *Veteran Movements*. Hughes is an artist, activist, curator, and Iraq War Illinois Army National Guard veteran living and working in Chicago. Hughes is also the NVAM Art Committee Chair and a NVAM Board Member.

**Amber Hoy** is the NEH/NVAM Curatorial Fellow for the Triennial Exhibition *Open/Closed*. Hoy is an artist, curator, and Iraq War Army veteran living and working in Rapid City, South Dakota where she is the Program Manager of Fellowships for the First Peoples Fund.

**Carlos Sirah** is the NEH/NVAM Curatorial Fellow for the Triennial Performance Program *Return to the Body*. Sirah is a writer and performer, Iraq War Army veteran, and native of the Mississippi Delta.

**Edgar Gonzalez-Baeza** is the NEH/NVAM Curatorial Fellow for the Triennial Education Program. Gonzalez-Baeza is an artist, art teacher, activist, and Iraq War Army Reserves veteran living and working near Chicago.

**Ian Alden Russell** is the NVAM Triennial Guest Curator for *Conflict Exchange*. He is a contemporary art curator from the EU and the U.S. and currently holds the post of Artistic Director of the K11 Kunsthalle Northern China.

**Julie Rodrigues Widholm** is the DePaul Art Museum Director and curator of NVAM Triennial Exhibition *Eric J. Garcia: The Bald Eagle's Toupee*. Rodrigues Widholm is Director and Chief Curator of DePaul Art Museum where she leads the strategic and artistic vision to promote equity and interdisciplinary education in the arts, while positioning Chicago as a global art city.

**Kevin Basl** is the NEH/NVAM Curatorial Fellow for the Triennial Literature Component *Rendezvous with Death: A Century of War Poetry by Veterans*. Basl is a writer, editor, musician, activist, and Iraq War Army veteran living and working near Ithaca, New York.

**Mia Lopez** is the DePaul Art Museum Assistant Curator and curator of National Veterans Art Museum Triennial Exhibition *Eric J. Garcia: The Bald Eagle's Toupee*. Lopez works on exhibitions, publications, and public programs at DePaul Art Museum, focusing on expanding the art historical canon.

**Yvette Pino** is the NEH/NVAM Curatorial Fellow for the Triennial Exhibition *CONVERGENCE* (including *Piece of Lead*). Pino is an artist, curator, founder of the Veteran Print Project, and an Iraq War Army veteran living and working in Madison, Wisconsin where she is the Traveling Art Exhibit Coordinator for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Pino is also a NVAM Board Member.

# VETERAN ART SUMMIT OVERVIEW

By Aaron Hughes, NVAM Triennial Lead Curator

The Veteran Art Summit, held May 3-5, 2019, brought together over fifty veteran artists from across the United States, with the intention of strengthening the veteran art community. It offered opportunities for veteran artists to learn from their peers, collaborate, network, and explore what it means to be an artist and a veteran today.

The Summit, which marked the opening of the 2019 NVAM Triennial, began with a welcome event and press conference. Speakers included U.S. Congressional Representative Chuy Garcia; Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Director Linda Chapa LaVia; NVAM Executive Director Brendan Foster; DePaul Art Museum Director Julie Rodrigues Widholm; and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) NVAM Curatorial Fellows, Carlos Sirah, Yvette Pino, Amber Hoy, Kevin Basl, Edgar Gonzalez-Baeza, and myself as NVAM Art Committee Chair. The welcome event was followed by presentations from creative veteran art projects from across the country, including Warrior Writers; *War, Literature & The Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*; Veteran Print Project; Veteran Book Project; Combat Paper; United States Veteran Artists' Alliance; CreatiVets; De-Cruit; and the emerging Veteran Art Movement.

Immediately following the welcome event, the Summit became an engaging, participatory space with the opening of *Return to the Body*, the Triennial's performance element. The opening featured a performative landscape procession in three parts, including work by veteran artist-performers Joseph Lefthand, Nicole Goodwin, and Kiam Marcelo Junio. The performance element of the Triennial, which included several other Summit events, is described by NEH Curatorial Fellow Carlos Sirah as follows: "the performers in [*Return to the Body*] negotiate relational strategies of de-weaponizing and repurposing the body, queering the veteran experience, and performative challenges to erasure, posing questions about our collective orientations." In the Performance Lab hosted by Sirah, the *Return to the Body* performers presented and discussed their work. The Lab also included an excerpted performance from dancer and choreographer Willyum LaBeija (from the Legendary House of LaBeija), who further developed his work *I Don't Consent* during the NVAM Performance Lab Residency, a partnership with the Chicago Cultural Center. A keynote performance the night of the exhibition openings at the Chicago Cultural Center included *This is Not a Drill*, a work-in-progress by Jefferson Pinder, and *AMAL* by the Combat Hippies. In *This is Not a Drill*, Pinder [from his performance description]: "trains a team of performers to venture into the deep south during Summer 2019." Taking inspiration from Goat Island's *How dear to me the hour when daylight dies*, Pinder's performance "aggressively prepares black bodies for stylized militancy in the face of history and white nationalism." The Combat Hippies' *AMAL* explores the search for meaning, purpose, and identity found through enlisting in the military, with a focus on Puerto Rico's cultural and military heritage. At the Summit, the Combat Hippies presented several excerpts from the full-length version of *AMAL*, which they're performing throughout the U.S. in 2019.

Throughout the Summit, the NEH NVAM Curatorial Fellows hosted a series of *Dialogues on the Experience of War*, which examined their respective curatorial visions in relation to the past century of veteran creative practices, from visual art to performance to literature. These dialogues were open to the public. Additionally,



U.S. Congressional Representative Chuy Garcia with the NEH Curatorial Fellows welcoming veteran artists to the NVAM Triennial & Veteran Art Summit. May 3, 2019

two Open Platform sessions (featuring a series of 15-minute presentations) gave veteran artists and community members an opportunity to share and learn about the wide range of art practices and projects happening within the emerging veteran art community.

A series of three panel discussions included *Arts & Military: Arts Moves Policy*, hosted by Art Alliance Illinois, and *Open/Closed*, hosted by NEH NVAM Curatorial Fellow Amber Hoy. The third, the keynote panel *Survival and Making Meaning*, hosted by NEH NVAM Curatorial Fellow Kevin Basl, featured special guests Roy Scranton and Iraqi-American artist Wafaa Bilal. Panelists read from their work and discussed why making art in a time of endless war, climate change and global crisis is vital.

Throughout the Summit, several galleries featured publicly-engaged art projects. In *Piece of Lead*, veteran artist Ehren Tool invited the Chicago community to make ceramic cups, exchange stories, and remember those who have been affected by gun violence. In *Conflict Exchange*, Wafaa Bilal, along with veteran artists Alicia Dietz and Drew Cameron, invited visitors to contribute to the rebuilding of the fine art library in the post-conflict University of Baghdad, by helping deconstruct military uniforms for papermaking or by purchasing Combat Paper crafted by Cameron. (*Conflict Exchange* engagement continues throughout the duration of the Triennial. A schedule of Cameron's workshop dates is included at the end of this article.)

As part of the Triennial's literature component, Warrior Writers hosted an open mic (which featured 12 veteran poets) at NVAM during the opening of *Open/Closed*. The following morning, Warrior Writers hosted *Anatomy of a War Poem*, a workshop led by Kevin Basl and Lovella Calica (founder and director of Warrior Writers), which gave participants the opportunity to write and share new work based on readings and group

discussion.

On the final day of the Summit, Eric J. Garcia presented a gallery talk on *The Bald Eagle's Toupee*, an exhibition highlighting his interdisciplinary practice. Garcia's work utilizes political satire to critique social and political issues, confronting corrupt politicians, gentrification, violence, racism, and other social injustices. *The Bald Eagle's Toupee* features a site-specific mural, projected animations, Garcia's *War Nest* (2016) installation, and a trailer for a forthcoming video game (produced in collaboration with Plug In Studio) which follows a veteran returning home and reacclimating to civilian life.

The Summit closed with a "Veteran Story Circle" based on the work of John O'Neil, founder of Free Southern Theater. Participants sat in a circle, each taking a turn describing experiences and themes from the summit. Participants – most of whom were veteran artists – reflected on how the featured artists' experiences and practices have opened new possibilities for further veteran art discourse and practices. Many described how the Summit inspired them to rethink and push their own work.

#### **Conflict Exchange schedule:**

Gallery hosts will be present every Friday throughout the Triennial with artist Drew Cameron present for Combat Paper workshop drop-ins on the following dates:

May 3rd: 1:00pm - 3:30pm  
May 4th: 10:00am - 3:00pm  
May 7, 8, 9, & 10th: 10am - 5pm  
June 4, 5, & 6th: 10am - 5pm  
July 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6th: 10am - 5pm



Joseph Lefthand performing *Things are Certainly Beautiful to Behold, but to Be Them is Something Quite Different*, from *Procession: Return to the Body*, May 3, 2019.



Nicole Goodwin performing in *Procession: Return to the Body*, May 3, 2019.



Roy Scranton, Kevin Basl, & Wafaa Bilal during *Survival and Making Meaning* keynote panel, May 3, 2019.



Combat Hippies performing during open mic hosted by Warrior Writers, May 3, 2019.



Jacob Thomas presenting during Open Platform session, May 3, 2019



Lovella Calica & Sylvia Bowersox embrace during the open mic hosted by Warrior Writers, May 3, 2019.



NEH *Dialogues on the Experience of War* discussion hosted by NEH Curatorial Fellow Kevin Basl, May 3, 2019.



NEH *Dialogues on the Experience of War* discussion hosted by NEH Curatorial Fellow Yvette Pino, May 4, 2019.



Performance Program cohort at the Performance Lab, May 4, 2019.



Ehren Tool making cups for guests in the *Piece of Lead* installation, May 4, 2019.

# CONFLICT EXCHANGE (CX)

Wafaa Bilal presents Alicia Dietz and Drew Cameron

Curated by Ian Alden Russell

Iraqi American Artist Wafaa Bilal launches the inaugural edition of his new work *Conflict Exchange (CX)* at the first National Veterans Art Museum Triennial. *CX* is a series of social platforms in the format of stores that explore the equity and relationships of post-conflict. In his inaugural edition, Bilal presents veteran artists Alicia Dietz and Drew Cameron, who are featured on this social platform.

Bilal developed *CX* as an extension of his celebrated interactive project *168:01*, which invites visitors to contribute to the rebuilding of the fine art library in the post-conflict University of Baghdad through their purchase of blank white books crafted by the artist. Inside the first *CX* store, visitors encounter products made from donated military fatigues by Combat Paper – a veteran artisan collective led by Cameron. Throughout the exhibition period, Combat Paper will manufacture these products in the *CX* store where patrons will have the chance to interact with artisans from the collective. The interior of the first *CX* store is designed by Dietz, an artist and crafts person whose work questions the boundary between soldiers and civilians. Visitors are encouraged to utilize the space designed by Dietz for encounters, interaction and communication. Visitors are invited to purchase the conflict byproducts from the store. All proceeds will contribute to the rebuilding of College of Fine Arts Library at the post-conflict University of Baghdad.



Drew Cameron, *Combat Paper & Vietnam Uniform*, 2019.

## Wafaa Bilal

Iraqi-born artist Wafaa Bilal, Professor of Art at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, is known internationally for his online performative and interactive works provoking dialogue about international politics and internal dynamics. In 2008 City Lights published *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*, about Bilal's life and his *Domestic Tension* project. He holds a BFA from the University of New Mexico and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work can be found in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL; MATHAF: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar; amongst others.

## Drew Cameron (Combat Paper)

Drew Cameron served in the Army in the Iraq War. He is a papermaking artist and co-founder of Combat Paper. He has facilitated papermaking workshops across the country for over a decade, while also developing his studio practice. His collaborative prints, portfolios, and books can be found in over forty public collections, including the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

## Alicia Dietz (Alicia Dietz Studios)

Iraq War veteran Alicia Dietz served as a Blackhawk helicopter maintenance test pilot and Company Commander in the U.S. Army. While seemingly two different areas of expertise, her career in the Army unexpectedly prepared Alicia to design and build. Along with her custom furniture and décor, Alicia creates military and concept pieces, such as *Fallen Soldiers* and *Collective Cadence*. Alicia's artwork takes on myriad forms and can be found across the country in forms such as the ZZQ Story Wall in Richmond, VA; a patchwork flag at the Chez Center for Wounded Veterans in Higher Education in Champaign, IL; and custom commission furniture pieces in a variety of homes.



Wafaa Bilal, *Conflict Exchange (CX)*, 2019. (Alicia Dietz, *Conflict Exchange: Cutting, Collaboration, and Conversation Round Table*, 2019. | Drew Cameron, *Combat Paper*, 2019.)

# RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH: A CENTURY OF WAR POETRY BY VETERANS

By Kevin Basl, Literature Component Curator

I cite a U.S. Army field exercise for sparking my interest in poetry – an artform most people likely don't associate with the military. It goes like this: In 2004, before my unit left to spend a month at the Army's National Training Center (NTC) in California, Sergeant C, my superior NCO, received a book of love poems as a joke. Preparing for our upcoming deployment to Iraq, we went to NTC (in the Mojave Desert) to practice land navigation, convoying and raid tactics. There was no love about it. About three weeks in, however, Sergeant C remembered the book and pulled it from his ruck. After perusing its pages – and no doubt delusional from exhaustion and the heat – he assigned each member of our six-person team to write a love poem, due tomorrow. Three flat out refused. I, on the other hand, jumped at the challenge (anything was better than rereading *Maxim* magazine). What then emerged in my olive drab notebook was not a love poem. It was cynical, morbid, fragmented, with not a lick of meter (or music either). In my verses, I compared

the mushy contents of MRE food to my own organs, from my brain, to my intestines, to my heart. My rifle was an "artificial spine." When I read it to Sergeant C he called me crazy, but commended my efforts. Perhaps it's ironic that the first "poem" I ever wrote – without knowing hardly anything about the literary history in the following pages – came from an army superior's mock-assignment and more than a little field fatigue.

Or perhaps it's not ironic. It seems a lot of poetry may have emerged in a similar way. I like to think I have something in common with the 12 authors included here (of course, I'm not comparing their incredible featured work to what I jotted down some 15 years ago). Written by American authors who served in the military during the war – or era – they write about (some, however, didn't necessarily serve in the U.S. military), these poems challenge, provoke and serve as a form of witness. They represent literary and social movements of the past century that have shaped American culture. They're

a pleasure to read, and it's no wonder why they've inspired other veterans to write their own poems.

Beyond the verses themselves, this literature guide, prepared for NVAM's inaugural Triennial, also includes short essays I've written to help readers see the poems in the Veteran Art Movement's historical context. I also encourage readers to use the discussion questions (intended for reading groups, classrooms and personal reflection) found in the educational section of this newspaper. War poetry, at its best, starts conversations. This guide is intended to do the same.

## WORLD WAR I (1914 to 1918)

Writing in 1936, German cultural critic Walter Benjamin described World War I: "A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds [...]" A war that leaders initially expected to take only a few months dragged on for four bloody years. In the end, 32 nations had gotten involved and some 18 million people had died. Casting a long shadow over the decades to come, the "Great War" toppled four empires, redefined borders, sparked the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and inspired artistic and social movements across the political spectrum. A fully mechanized war, the promise of the industrial revolution – that machines would make life easier for all – instead kept the battlefields of Western Europe locked in trench warfare. Outmoded, linear fighting tactics met machine guns, tanks, chemical weapons and airplanes. Ideas of chivalry and honor lost meaning as combat became increasingly futile.

In contrast to this brutality, World War I was a literary war. Soldiers read, wrote and discussed poetry on the front lines, the British especially. Poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon

regularly sent their verses home to England for publication. While American soldiers didn't produce near the poetic output of the British (primarily because the U.S. wasn't in the war as long), a small body of American World War I poetry by veterans exists. Poet **Alan Seeger**, an American expat living in Paris before the war, joined the French Foreign Legion in 1914. Two years later, he would die in the Battle of the Somme. Prophetically, his poems "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" and "Maktoob" (1917) explore themes of predestination and mortality (note his use of Arabic – common in the poems of today's GWOT veterans). Seeger's work wouldn't be published until a year following his death, after the British war poets had begun eschewing florid language and patriotic naivete. T.S. Eliot, reviewing Seeger's poems, writes, "The work is well done, and so much out of date as to be almost a positive quality. It is high-flown, heavily decorated and solemn [...]"

Seeger's poems appeared "out of date" because of trends – rather, major upheavals – happening in the art world at the time. The era leading up to and following World War I, the

"modernist" period, is generally characterized by its radical break from cultural traditions. Responding to the devastation of the war, artistic movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism (both major influences on poetry) blamed Western institutions for leading society astray. Capitalism, Christianity, and Enlightenment ideals were under attack. In literature, techniques of fragmentation, "chance operations," and stream-of-consciousness were employed. Free verse poetry – verses that avoid strict meter and rhyme – would become the prevalent form (and remains so today). An example of such work is "next to of course god america i" (1926) by **E.E. Cummings**, who served as an ambulance driver in the war. Politically, his poems echo those written by the British soldier-poets in the war's later years. However, his humorous tone, idiosyncratic punctuation and odd syntax set him apart. His poetry remains fresh today.

1. "Maktoob" by Alan Seeger

2. "next to of course god america i" by E.E. Cummings

# Maktoob

by Alan Seeger

A shell surprised our post one day  
And killed a comrade at my side.  
My heart was sick to see the way  
He suffered as he died.

I dug about the place he fell,  
And found, no bigger than my thumb,  
A fragment of the splintered shell  
In warm aluminum.

I melted it, and made a mould,  
And poured it in the opening,  
And worked it, when the cast was cold,  
Into a shapely ring.

And when my ring was smooth and bright,  
Holding it on a rounded stick,  
For seal, I bade a Turco write  
Maktoob in Arabic.

Maktoob! "Tis written!" . . . So they think,  
These children of the desert, who  
From its immense expanses drink  
Some of its grandeur too.

Within the book of Destiny,  
Whose leaves are time, whose cover, space,  
The day when you shall cease to be,  
The hour, the mode, the place,

Are marked, they say; and you shall not  
By taking thought or using wit  
Alter that certain fate one jot,  
Postpone or conjure it.

Learn to drive fear, then, from your heart.  
If you must perish, know, O man,  
'Tis an inevitable part  
Of the predestined plan.

And, seeing that through the ebon door  
Once only you may pass, and meet  
Of those that have gone through before  
The mighty, the elite –

Guard that not bowed nor blanched with fear  
You enter, but serene, erect,  
As you would wish most to appear  
To those you most respect.

So die as though your funeral  
Ushered you through the doors that led  
Into a stately banquet hall  
Where heroes banqueted;

And it shall all depend therein  
Whether you come as slave or lord,  
If they acclaim you as their kin  
Or spurn you from their board.

So, when the order comes: "Attack!"  
And the assaulting wave deploys,  
And the heart trembles to look back  
On life and all its joys;

Or in a ditch that they seem near  
To find, and round your shallow trough  
Drop the big shells that you can hear  
Coming a half mile off;

When, not to hear, some try to talk,  
And some to clean their guns, or sing,  
And some dig deeper in the chalk –  
I look upon my ring:

And nerves relax that were most tense,  
And Death comes whistling down unheard,  
As I consider all the sense  
Held in that mystic word.

And it brings, quieting like balm  
My heart whose flutterings have ceased,  
The resignation and the calm  
And wisdom of the East.

# next to of course god america i

by E.E. Cummings

"next to of course god america i  
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh  
say can you see by the dawn's early my  
country 'tis of centuries come and go  
and are no more. what of it we should worry  
in every language even deafanddumb  
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry  
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum  
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-  
iful than these heroic happy dead  
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter  
they did not stop to think they died instead  
then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water



# IFF

by Howard Nemerov

1.

Hate Hitler? No, I spared him hardly a thought.  
But Corporal Irmin, first, and later on  
The O.C. (Flying), Wing Commander Briggs,  
And the station C.O. Group Captain Ormerly -  
Now there were men were objects fit to hate,  
Hitler a moustache and a little curl  
In the middle of his forehead, whereas these  
Bastards were bastards in your daily life,  
With Power in their pleasure, smile or frown.

2.

Not to forget my navigator Bert,  
Who shyly explained to me that the Jews  
Were ruining England and Hitler might be wrong  
But he had the right idea...We were a crew,  
And went on so, the one pair left alive  
Of a dozen that chose each other flipping coins  
At the OTU, but spoke no civil word  
Thereafter, beyond the words that had to do  
With the drill for going out and getting back.

3.

One night, with a dozen squadrons coming home  
To Manston, the tower gave us orbit and height  
To wait our turn in their lofty waiting-room,  
And on every circuit, when we crossed the Thames,  
Our gunners in the estuary below  
Loosed off a couple of dozen rounds on spec,  
Defending the Commonwealth as detailed to do,  
Their lazy lights so slow, then whipping past.  
All the above were friends. And then the foe.

## The Crowded Countries of the Bomb

by George Oppen

What man could do,  
And could not  
And chance which has spared us  
Choice, which has shielded us

As if a god. What is the name of that place  
We have entered:  
Despair? Ourselves?

That we can destroy ourselves  
Now

Walking in the shelter,  
The young and the old,  
Of each other's backs and shoulders

Entering the country that is  
Impenetrably ours.

# WORLD WAR II

(1939 to 1945)

The Great War, of course, was not the war to end all wars, as so many had hoped. Nationalism and economic depression – aftereffects of World War I – enabled Hitler and Mussolini’s fascist, imperialist agendas to take hold, in turn forcing Europe into yet another war. In the Asia-Pacific region, Japan, in its own quest for power, attacked multiple countries, including China, India, the Philippines and the United States, opening a second theater of war. In every sense of the definition, World War II was a “total war,” marshaling industrial, economic, natural and human resources on an unprecedented scale. It involved over 60 nations and claimed the lives of some 57 million people, over half of them civilians. In the Holocaust alone, the Nazis systematically murdered millions of Jews, gay men, gypsies, political dissidents, intellectuals and disabled people. Both Axis and Allied air raids bombed large urban populations, also causing a staggering amount of civilian deaths. In the most extreme example, the two nuclear bombs dropped by the U.S. on Japan, together, instantly incinerated well over 100,000 people. “We can destroy ourselves now,” **George Oppen**, World War II U.S. Army veteran and Pulitzer-winning poet, writes in “The Crowded Countries of the Bomb” (1962). To this day, the threat of nuclear war still

significantly influences global politics (and human consciousness).

Faced with such immense power and destruction, it’s no wonder that questions of truth and free will, paranoia, racism, and personal and national traumas became major themes in literature by World War II veterans (and many other writers as well). Novels by veterans Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, and Thomas Pynchon became some of the most famous works of 20th century American literature, while poets like Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Kenneth Koch returned from the war and helped start influential poetry movements (Beat poetry and the New York School, respectively). Like the British World War I soldier-poets, American World War II veterans would also eventually produce a significant body of war poetry, much of which challenges nostalgic, popular representations of the “Good War.” World War II veteran and poet Harvey Shapiro compares the two bodies of work in *Poets of World War II* (2003): “the Americans write in quite a different tone. Their poems are often bawdy, bitchy, irreverent. They do not glory in brotherhood and they do not, as a rule, find nobility in one another.” Beyond the common tensions of close-quartered military life, one must not forget that the ranks were still segregated by law until

1948. Black troops talked of the “Double V” – victory against fascism abroad and racism at home. Anti-Semitism also infected the Allied armies. **Howard Nemerov**, a veteran of the U.S. Army Air Force Royal Canadian Unit, depicts this bigotry in his poem “IFF” (1987) (the acronym “IFF” is radar terminology for “identification: friend or foe”).

Any 20th century American literary history would not be complete without mentioning the G.I. Bill. Passed in 1946, the bill would guarantee a college education, housing, and other benefits to World War II veterans – people who otherwise may not have gotten such opportunities (most of the writers listed above used it). The G.I. Bill, often credited with helping establish a strong American middle class, would not only put thousands of working class veterans on college campuses, it would help jump-start some of the MFA creative writing programs that veterans continue to attend today.

1. Howard Nemerov “IFF”
2. George Oppen “The Crowded Countries of the Bomb”

# KOREAN WAR

(1950 to 1953)

“Back to the combat zone,” begins **Keith Wilson’s** poem “December, 1952” (1969). Wilson, a navy veteran, visited Korea three times during the war. While that opening verse certainly references his own repeat war experience, it also portrays a weariness no doubt felt by many service members and World War II veterans (some of whom could get recalled) at the prospect of another fight, just five years after the surrender of the Axis powers. When communist North Korea surprise-attacked U.S.-backed South Korea in June 1950, the U.S. government scrambled to react, fearing the spread of communism. The stakes were higher than before, with the Soviet Union, the U.S.’s main Cold War adversary, now possessing nuclear capabilities. With communist China and the Soviet Union supporting the North Koreans, the battle over the Korean peninsula could have easily set off World War III.

Sometimes referred to as the “Forgotten War,” Korean War veterans for decades endured public confusion over whether theirs was actually a war, or rather a “conflict” or a “police action.” Technically, there was no formal declaration of war. It was called a “United Nations police action” because the U.S., along with 21 other member-

nations, rallied under the UN flag to defend South Korea (however the U.S. initiated and led the fight). But it was a war by any measure. Well over a million people died – more than half civilians – including over 50,000 U.S. service members. Conditions were brutal, with harsh winters, guerrilla warfare, and distrust between U.S. and South Korean soldiers only adding to the stress. In some cases, battlefield conditions were so bad that they’ve been compared to the trenches of World War I. Written years after he came home, Korean War veteran **Rolando Hinzosa’s** poetry collection *Korean Love Songs* (1978) describes such conditions (while also offering accounts of discrimination faced by Chicano soldiers in the war). In “Jacob Mosqueda Wrestles with the Angels” the narrator depicts in violent detail the psychological trauma Mosqueda endures watching friends get killed in battle, while ironically insisting that Mosqueda, like everyone, will forget.

Literature by Korean War veterans was not well-received. W.D. Ehrhart and Philip K. Jason offer an explanation why in the introduction to *Retrieving Bones* (1999), one of the few anthologies of Korean War literature: “World War II and the Vietnam War each touched the very fabric of the society,

altered an entire generation, and changed both the perception and self-perception of the nation on the world stage in ways that the Korean War simply did not.” Interestingly, it would be the Vietnam War that would inspire some Korean War veterans to write about their own war, often with antiwar reflections (Wilson and Hinzosa being two examples).

The Korean War, for which no peace treaty was ever signed, continues to play out today. North and South Korea remain divided at the 38th parallel, at almost the exact same boundary established at the close of World War II. Negotiations to end North Korea’s nuclear arms program still make headlines. The U.S. military maintains a force of over 20,000 in South Korea. Not surprisingly, veterans continue to write about the conflict. Most recently, Eric McMillan, a GWOT veteran, published a short story, “We Go Together” (2018), about the follies of a misfit platoon training near the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in South Korea.

1. Keith Wilson “December, 1952”
2. Rolando Hinzosa “Jacob Mosqueda Wrestles with the Angels”

# December, 1952

by Keith Wilson

Back to the combat zone.

Ships, exactly stationed, at darkness  
their wakes catch white fire, long graceful lines  
blue stacksmoke, fading to night

red battle lamps, men walking  
ghosts in the chain lockers  
old chanties sung in the small watches  
of morning

*Nelson, battle signals snapping,  
coming about, broadside ready*

*Farragut, headed in...  
the shores blazing with light  
exploding shells a terror,  
the calm voice on the bridge*

*Skeleton crews, prize ships,  
returning to Ur of the Chaldees, swords raised  
gleaming before the dying sun*

A blue United Nations patch on the arm, a new  
dream. One World. One  
Nation.

Peace.

The old bangles, dangled  
once more, always working,  
buying allegiances

stabbing  
tracers hit a village,  
the screams of women, children  
men die

It is when the bodies are counted  
man sees the cost of lies, tricks  
that blind the eyes of the young. *Freedom.*  
Death. *A life safe for.* The Dead.

Casualties are statistics  
for a rising New York Stock Market -  
its ticker tapes hail the darkeyed  
survivors, and cash registers  
click, all over the nation, these men  
deceive themselves. War is for. The Dead.

# Jacob Mosqueda Wrestles with the Angels

by Rolando Hinojosa

Mosqueda doesn't believe it for one minute,  
but it's true;  
And although he swears he'll never forget it,  
he will  
As we all do, as we all should  
and do.

The scraps of flesh on Mosqueda's sleeve  
Belonged to Hatalski or Frazier,  
one of the two;  
And when they splashed there, Mosqueda screamed and fainted  
And soiled his fatigues. And yet,  
Unhurt and all,  
He was carried off as if a casualty, and maybe he was...  
But he'll forget it, in time;  
In time we all do, and should.

On the other hand,  
If Mosqueda had lost an arm or a leg or an eye, a nose or an ear,  
He'd not forget it nor would others let him, but  
One man's meat is not another's souvenir,  
And so, Mosqueda will forget;  
If not, he'll become a bore, and a bother, or a public nuisance.  
But Mosqueda will forget;  
His skin wasn't even pinked, let alone charred or burned  
Or blasted into someone else's clothing  
When the rocket burst. And,

When the rocket burst, Mosqueda was between the gun  
And Joey Vielma, a casual visitor who came calling,  
But this proves little except, perhaps, a law of probabilities.  
The burst took off Hatalski's face  
And Frazier's life as well; Joey Vielma caught it in the chest and face,  
But Mosqueda was unhurt...

He screamed anyway,  
And the other gun crews froze for an instant.  
Some came running in time  
To retch and gag and vomit over the dead.  
As the fainting Mosqueda screamed and cried and sobbed  
And yet  
He was unhurt  
When the rocket burst.

As for me, my hand was nicked a bit, my eyes and face peppered,  
When the sun glasses broke in half;  
Later, in a stagger, I came upon the binocs  
Some fifteen yards away.  
But, as I've said, Mosqueda was unhurt, and,  
Given time,  
he'll forget.

# A Downed Black Pilot Learns How to Fly

by Horace Coleman

"now that the war is over  
we'll have to kill each other again  
but I'll send my medals to Hanoi  
and let them make bullets if  
they'll ship my leg back and  
if they mail me an ash tray  
made from my F4C they can keep  
the napalm as a bonus. Next time  
I'll wait and see if they've declared  
war on me - or just America."

# The Best Act in Pleiku, No One Under 18 Admitted

by Sharon Grant Wildwind

I kissed a Negro, trying to breath life into him.  
When I was a child - back in the world -  
the drinking fountains said, "White Only."  
His cold mouth tasted of dirt and marijuana.  
He died and I put away the things of a child.

Once upon a time there was a handsome, blond soldier.  
I grabbed at flesh  
combing out bits of shrapnel and bits of bone  
with bare fingers.

A virgin undressed men,  
touched them in public.  
By the time I bedded a man  
who didn't smell like mud and burned flesh  
He made love and I made jokes.

# VIETNAM WAR

(1965 to 1975)

Throughout the late 60s and early 70s, Americans were regularly treated to gritty footage sent home by embedded reporters in Vietnam. Around dinner time, major networks aired news from the front lines, giving viewers a closer look at the war in Southeast Asia being waged in their name. Beyond the daily grind of the war, the news showed service members wounded in combat, using drugs, and saying that killing Vietnamese people “don’t mean nothing.” What Americans saw and what politicians said didn’t square.

The Vietnam War – an extremely unpopular war – shares several key similarities with the Korean War. Like its predecessor, it too was undeclared (thus explaining instances of “Vietnam Conflict,” and controversy over when it started, with some arguing as early as 1954). It was another example of the Cold War turned hot, with communist North Vietnam pushing to reclaim U.S.-backed South Vietnam in an effort to reunify the nation and dispel Western capitalist influence. Again there was distrust between allies, the South Vietnamese and the U.S. military, as well as an enemy using guerrilla tactics. And while Vietnam didn’t have the brutal winters of Korea, it did have its own harsh conditions, including dense foliage, monsoon rains, and stifling heat. Where the wars differ significantly (beyond the frequent, embedded news coverage) is in the resistance that emerged in protest of the Vietnam War – notably, among service members and veterans.

A wide-reaching antiwar veterans

movement influenced everything from daily military life to legislation to poetry. In the latter half of the 60s, veterans and service members began joining antiwar protests and marches, sometimes as speakers. G.I. coffeehouses opened near bases, offering troops counterculture books and information, live music and a place to talk politics freely with fellow service members. An underground G.I. resistance press, often organized in the coffeehouses, produced over 200 newspaper titles, each featuring articles, artwork, poetry and more. Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) would grow to over 30,000 members. The organization put on hundreds of demonstrations and advocated for the rights of both veterans and the Vietnamese (and, decades later, would inspire Iraq Veterans Against the War). Published under the auspices of VVAW, literature anthologies including *Winning Hearts and Minds* (1972) and *Demilitarized Zones* (1976) gave Vietnam veterans a place to share their words – a first publishing opportunity for many. Some of those authors would go on to have successful careers as writers and teachers, including Bruce Weigl, W.D. Ehrhart and Jan Barry.

War poetry by Vietnam veterans often sheds light not only on combat conditions but also on major U.S. social movements of the 60s and 70s, including the Civil Rights, Black Power and Feminist Movements. First appearing in *Demilitarized Zones*, Air Force veteran **Horace Coleman’s** “A Downed Black Pilot Learns How to Fly” (1976) succinctly expresses sentiments felt by many black troops in

Vietnam: the real enemy was not North Vietnam, but rather racism at home. Similarly depicting racial tensions, former army nurse **Sharon Grant Wildwind’s** “Best Act in Pleiku, No One Under 18 Admitted” (1982) also represents the complications – and trauma – of being a young nurse in the war (women have served in the U.S. military since the American Revolution; however, the widespread use of helicopters in Vietnam put more women-nurses closer to combat, as near-death casualties were quickly flown from the fight to the field hospital).

Today, a robust community of Vietnam veteran writers and artists continues to host readings and exhibitions, trade work and run small presses. They visit literary events in Vietnam, translate Vietnamese poetry and mentor younger veteran writers. Perhaps the best example is the William Joiner Institute’s annual writing workshop, held in Boston for over 30 years. Hundreds of veterans have attended, with instructors including many of the names listed above, as well as Tim O’Brien, Yusef Komunyakaa, Fred Marchant, Kevin Bowen and more. Notably, the National Veterans Art Museum itself began as one of these communities: the Vietnam Veterans Art Group.

1. Horace Coleman “A Downed Black Pilot Learns How to Fly”
2. Sharon Grant Wildwind “Best Act in Pleiku, No One Under 18 Admitted”

# GULF WAR

(1991)

After years of so-called “Vietnam syndrome” (a term used by George Bush Sr. to describe Americans’ reluctance to enter another war after losing in Vietnam, interventions in Central America notwithstanding), the stage was set for war with Iraq. In August 1990, Saddam Hussein attacked and occupied Kuwait over an oil production conflict and boundary dispute. The U.S. government, who had ostensibly backed the criminal dictator throughout the Iran-Iraq War in the 80s, knew that if he held Kuwait he would control roughly 20 percent of the world’s oil supply. Soon after Hussein’s invasion, U.S. troops deployed to neighboring Saudi Arabia, where for the next several months they sat awaiting orders (the Saudis, worried Hussein might also attack their country, reluctantly invited U.S. protection). Finally, in January 1991, the U.S., aided by a coalition of over two dozen nations, entered Kuwait to expel the Iraqi military. After a 42-day air and (limited) ground war – with hundreds of burning oil wells blackening the sky and a “highway of death” littered with the bodies and vehicles of thousands of retreating Iraqi troops bombed by U.S. air support – Bush Sr. declared a ceasefire. Surprisingly, however, Hussein remained in power (the U.N. sanctions then imposed on Iraq, coupled with Hussein’s ongoing oppressive rule, would lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis throughout the 90s).

During the Gulf War, journalists didn’t enjoy the same degree of access they had had in

Vietnam. Interestingly, however, this is when 24-hour news coverage began (CNN led the way), with major media networks employing methods of the entertainment industry. While TV viewers watched fuzzy, green-tinted live broadcasts of missile strikes, jets blasting off, and tracer rounds illuminating the night (not unlike a video game), reporters were, in most cases, escorted by government officials and getting information via military briefings. Americans didn’t get on-the-ground, embedded coverage like they had during the Vietnam War. This censorship, along with the fast, “in-and-out” nature of the operation, was no doubt planned, at least in part, to avert dissent like what emerged during the Vietnam War. Yellow ribbon campaigns and reminders to “support the troops” (invoking the controversial idea that Vietnam veterans had been abused by protestors) likely also helped silence critical voices. Notably, today’s veteran writers, artists and activists work in a cultural climate characterized by high-production military appreciation events and the ubiquitous “thank you for your service” gesture – phenomena rooted in Gulf War-era symbols and rhetoric.

Similar to Korean War veterans, most poetry by Gulf War veterans wouldn’t come until years later. Collections like Bill Glose’s *Half a Man* (2013) and **Anthony Aiello’s** *Equipment* (2014), for example, weren’t published until after Barack Obama pulled most troops from Iraq (the second war) in December 2011. Like the war poets before them, they cover

topics of grotesque violence, trauma, moral ambiguity, and technological immersion. Aiello, in particular, employs a style used by many of the Vietnam War poets, with terse language mostly free of metaphors and similes (though entire poems themselves often seem to function as metaphors for war itself). The poets also cover this era’s significant military-social issues, including the “economic draft” and “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” The former refers to the all-volunteer U.S. military’s tendency to enlist people mostly of low-income status (the official draft ended in 1973). Aiello’s “William Rivera, PFC” follows a man who leaves violence and poverty in Chicago to join the army – only to find himself involved in another kind of violence. The latter topic, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” is the 1994 policy banning gay troops from serving openly. Gulf War-era army veteran **Karen Skolfield’s** “Why I Never Wrote about the Army” (2017) provides a glimpse into life under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” Notably, while this legislation was repealed in 2010, a recent ban on transgender service members (which went into effect April 2019) demonstrates the U.S. military continues to grapple with issues of inclusivity.

1. Anthony Aiello “William Rivera, PFC”
2. Karen Skolfield “Why I Never Wrote about the Army”

# William Rivera, PFC

by Anthony Aiello

Willie left Chicago's North Side  
because he didn't want to die  
a gangbanger like Small Change  
who got rained on with a .38,  
or Hippo - *un Puertorriqueño  
muy gordo* - who some Players  
ran down & ran over like a rat  
in an alley. We all wanted  
to grow up, move on, get over, get away  
from somewhere or somewhen.  
Willie signed on to stay alive.  
He raised his right hand  
& ended up like the rest of us at Bragg.

II  
Like the rest of us who ran together,  
Willie & I were brothers;  
but Willie drank hard, could really put it away -  
vodka during duty, beer or rum at night;  
didn't mind fighting whoever he could find  
when drunk blind. One night he came at me  
with a swing & a miss, then another,  
then strike three. Willie kept at me  
until I threw him down, sank my fingers  
in his throat, choked my friend  
until his head lolled, his eyes bulged red  
then rolled white, & two guys pried  
me from his neck. Willie almost died,  
awoke on an Army psych ward, found himself  
walking in a robe & foam slippers

to greet me, trade apologies with his visitor.  
He explained Uncle Sam's answer  
to AA traded Phases for the Twelve Steps.  
He counted them like a cadence call:  
One, Two, Three, & lockdown in a looney-bin  
makes Four. Willie got out & got drunk  
in celebration, but when the battery  
deplaned in Saudi - an entire country  
drier than any Carolina baptist county -  
Willie apologized for dragging our asses  
with his to Phase Five.

III  
When the battery marched forth  
in support of the 24th Mech Infantry,  
our rockets blazed a tank-trail toward Basra  
& a battle with the Hammurabi Guards  
that didn't happen once the war ended,  
a fight that faded like sleep deprivation  
hallucinations edging Willie's sight -  
phantom jets & smoke trails that reminded  
him of the DT haze back on the ward  
or smoking PCP back in the day, on the block  
with friends who had died. But Willie survived  
it all: bats & knives on the North Side,  
Army bullshit & Iraqi bullets. Willie saw  
past the shamals; in blinding sand  
without even a hint of the path, he saw  
it through, kept it cool. That was Willie:  
driving away from one place, ending up

in the shit: from Chi-town streets  
to Army drunk-tank to Saudi sand-trap  
& then Iraq: sand-blind  
in a storm - but somehow still  
slowly heading home.

# Why I Never Wrote about the Army

by Karen Skolfield

Four hours a night  
and we slept with our rifles,  
strap twined around skinny forearms,  
brass and ammo locked away  
and catch on safety.  
Drill Sergeant Robinson warned  
that if he snuck  
into our shelter halves  
and nabbed a rifle,  
why, we'd be pushing  
Fort Dix off the map.  
We laughed, our voices too high,  
our camouflage paint cracking  
into frightened, toothy grins.  
He held a rifle over his head:  
"For the next eight weeks,  
this is your boyfriend!"  
I thought, "girlfriend."

No one in my platoon  
breathed a word the nights  
Alexis crept into my bunk.  
After full-pack road marches I'd wake  
screaming from a charley horse,  
animal sounds ragged  
and out of touch with the night.  
They were glad I had someone

to smooth my cramped muscles  
and shut me up. And everyone  
was so far from home.  
Latest rumor was that  
a girl in the next platoon  
was getting discharged  
for being queer  
and I asked my ranger buddy  
to point her out  
but she couldn't, and me dying  
to know what one looked like.

# 35 x 36

by Khadijah Queen

for GSM1

who fell out of that gash  
burning

who pushed and was pushed,  
shock-shook, skin

falling from her face      like debris

whose adrenaline  
slowed the salt-sting  
of seawater bathing her

muscles, unraveling  
in tiny ribbons –

who felt screams  
welling in her throat, the sound of tons  
of steel      bending  
as the world      went silent

who saved a man twice her size  
and only in so doing  
saved  
herself –

## Letter to Lieutenant Owen from the Twenty-First Century

by Hugh Martin

– 9/3/13 New Concord, OH

Still children ardent for some desperate  
glory, aiming guns at Baghdad before  
we're twenty. Midwest in America (you haven't  
been): the reds & yellows of leaves swarm  
the streets' curbs as the State talks of bombs  
they'll send as a message. Simple, sir,  
to drop them where you're not. Damascus –  
City of Jasmine – shelled with Sarin.  
What's changed since your World  
War, which still we call *The Great*? Today  
we name them Operations. Each speech ends  
*God bless America*. Through the panes  
of your mask that man still drowns,  
& still, the soldiers: not dead, just *Fallen*.

One morning they gassed us, only once,  
in northern Kentucky where America keeps  
its bullion behind barbed wire. We danced –  
we were made to – in a room where white steam  
crawled along the walls & then we slipped  
off our masks: it was like the needles of a pine  
brushing my iris. Burning skin. We yelled  
our Socials with snot-strings on our chins.  
As you said, sir, it is sweet & right  
to huff gas for one's country, to shave  
for one's country because, otherwise,  
the mask won't seal. Can you believe,  
sir, a death from stubble? & isn't that  
something: City of Jasmine. Can you imagine?

# GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

## (2001 TO –)

A series of terrorist attacks against the U.S. – motivated by religious fundamentalism, poverty and opposition to U.S. expansionism and hegemony – came in the wake of the Gulf War. First came the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center. Then came the 1996 car bomb in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 U.S. airmen. Then, the 1998 simultaneous bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa. Later, in 2000, suicide bombers blew an enormous hole in the side of the U.S.S. Cole while it sat refueling in Yemen's Gulf of Aden, killing 17 sailors (navy veteran **Khadijah Queen's** poem "35 x 36" is about this attack). Finally, on September 11, 2001, Al Qaeda militants hijacked planes and flew them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing almost 3,000 people. Soon thereafter, George Bush Jr. called for a "Global War on Terror" and, attempting to make a complex problem appear simple, drew a line in the sand: "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists." In the coming years, the U.S. would go to war with Afghanistan (now the longest running U.S. war in history), a second war with Iraq, as well as getting involved in numerous other conflicts around the world, sometimes covertly.

Perhaps more than any other American war of the past century, the Global War on Terror (GWOT) evades qualification. The title itself is like Orwell's doublespeak. "Global," of course, could mean anywhere, anytime. "Terror," a tactic rather than a sovereign state or human entity, implies anything from guerrilla warfare, to computer hacking, to anonymous death threats – the enemy is essentially undefined. While the term "GWOT" has fallen out of fashion among politicians in the 2010s, the U.S. is still deeply entrenched in the military operations kicked off by the George Bush Jr. administration in 2001, involvement

in Iraq and Afghanistan especially. Black ops sites, cyber warfare, ubiquitous surveillance, unmanned aerial drones, extralegal detention, extraordinary rendition, torture, militarized police – GWOT provides context for understanding these unsettling developments. Pejoratively referred to as the "Forever War," it continues with no end in sight, while most Americans go about their daily lives.

Significantly, as military and surveillance technology evolved, the internet became ubiquitous and high quality media production capabilities became accessible to nearly everyone. Soldiers themselves became like embedded journalists – or participant-observers – uploading helmet-cam footage, dash-cam images of IED explosions and videos of combat zone life to Youtube and other social media platforms. War blogs would also offer a direct line from the combat zone to the American household. Similar to the G.I. resistance newspapers of the Vietnam War, these blogs featured raw reflections, photos and creative writing. Colby Buzzell's memoir *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (2005) originated as a blog. Iraq Veterans Against the War member Garrett Reppenhagen's poem "Letter from Iraq," first posted on the blog *Fight to Survive*, became a popular Bouncing Souls anthem. Not surprisingly, multimedia poetry performances, often influenced by spoken word (or "slam") techniques, have become popular in the veteran arts community in recent years. The performances incorporate music, video, dance and more. Examples include the Combat Hippies' (Iraq War veterans Hipólito Arriaga and Anthony Torres') *AMAL* (2019),  *Holding It Down: Veterans' Dreams Project* (2012) (featuring veteran poets Maurice Decaul and Lynn Hill) and Iraq War veteran Aaron Hughes' *Poetry Despite, Music Despite* (2019) (which features two Syrian refugee rappers and former conductor of the Iraqi Symphony Orchestra,

Karim Wasfi). However, on-the-page, free verse poetry remains as popular as ever. Poets like Iraq War veterans Brian Turner and **Hugh Martin** have published collections firmly situated within the poetic tradition covered throughout this survey (Martin's "Letter to Lieutenant Owen from the Twenty-First Century" (2018) is in dialogue with Wilfred Owen's well-known World War I poem "Dulce et Decorum Est").

Veteran writing workshops, like those started by the Vietnam generation, have grown in popularity. Organizations like Warrior Writers, the NYU Veterans Writing Workshop, Words After War, Veterans Writing Project and many more, have created opportunities for veterans beyond the traditional university MFA creative writing track (of course, some veterans attend MFA programs as well – often utilizing their G.I. Bill benefits to pay tuition). Most of these organizations have published anthologies of veteran writing, like *VVAW* in the 70s. Literary journals such as *War, Literature and the Arts*, *Consequence* and *O'Dark Thirty* have also published many veterans. Contests like the Jeff Sharlet Memorial Award, presented by *The Iowa Review*, have helped raise the profile of numerous emerging veteran writers. These programs and venues provide creative resources, literary communities and publishing opportunities to veterans who may have otherwise struggled in obscurity – or may have never even attempted to write a poem.

1. Khadijah Queen "35 x 36"
2. Hugh Martin "Letter to Lieutenant Owen from the Twenty First Century"

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# MAKING MEANING WITH RECURRING CREATIVE TACTICS: THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF VETERAN ART

By Aaron Hughes, *Making Meaning* Curator

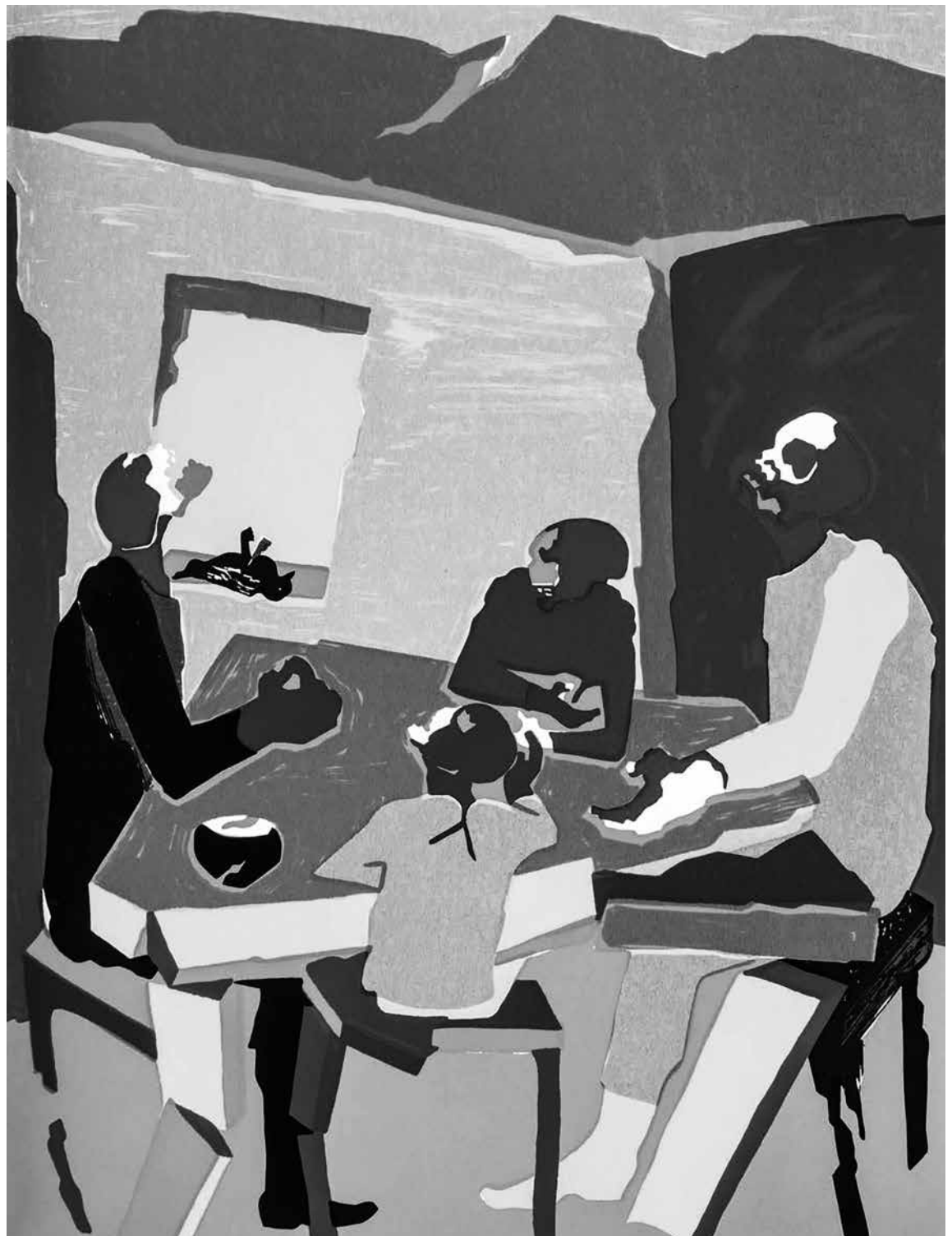
... If art purports to register the true experience of violence or devastating loss – to be about a particular event – then it lays claim to an experience that is fundamentally owned by someone... [and] invites a wider audience to partake of this experience in some way.

– Jill Bennett, *Empathetic Vision* (2005)

*Making Meaning* presents a survey of veteran art, from World War I to the Global War on Terror, from representations of subjective experiences to political provocations. These works express the overall vision of the NVAM Triennial: [they] address the complications and complexities of war and military service, while challenging the perception that veterans and service members are the only people who can understand these experiences. The featured artists investigate and express topics of violence, devastating loss and trauma – pain and suffering that is often thought to be indescribable, or beyond language and representation. They take viewers into this perceived void of understanding, transforming the ineffable into imagery, forms, symbols and language that is recognisable, yet doesn't rely on reference points found in everyday life. Across generations, veteran artists have made violence and loss tangible, inviting viewers to witness, acknowledge – perhaps even experience for themselves – these traumas. The artists ultimately demonstrate that war is a social issue that all people must work to understand and address.

Veteran artist Ash Kyrle has said that the reason he makes work (and perhaps why many veterans make work) is not for his own personal healing but, rather, for the viewer's and society's healing. Currently there are many art programs and projects focused on "healing veterans." These programs usually focus on veterans' subjective experiences, with an understanding that self-expression can help veterans salve their psychological wounds. However, historic and contemporary art discourses have often framed art made about traumatic experiences very differently. In *Empathetic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* Jill Bennett writes, "[...] Visual art presents trauma as a political rather than subjective phenomenon. It does not offer us a privileged view of an inner subject; rather, by giving trauma extension in space [...] it invites [...] awareness [...]" *Making Meaning* is ultimately an invitation to awareness, to highlight the history of veteran creative practices which address the political implications of trauma.

Another passage from *Empathetic Vision* is instructive for understanding these veteran artworks: "[...] Trauma is classically defined as beyond the scope of language and representation; hence, an imagery of trauma might not readily conform to logic of representation." Testing the "logic of representation," viewers entering the *Making Meaning* exhibition space first encounter three generations of veteran artists, from the print series *Hiroshima* (1983) by World War II veteran Jacob Lawrence, to Vietnam War veteran Richard Yohnka's paintings *Shell Game* (1983) and *Arcade Barker* (1983), to Iraq War veteran David Keefe's

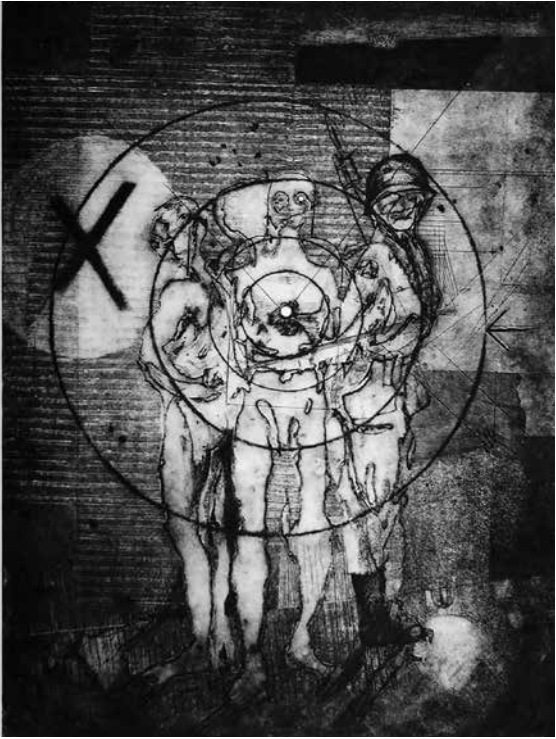


Jacob Lawrence, *Family: Hiroshima*, 1983.

painting *The King of the World* (2016). Each of these works plays with the representational spaces they present, adding surreal elements to express the trauma of violence and loss. For example, Lawrence responds to the atomic destruction of Hiroshima with sympathetic renderings of doomed figures caught in the moment of the "noiseless flash." The figures – skull-faced, almost monster-like and void of any specific identifying characteristics – are presented in everyday spaces, e.g. "Playground" and "Market." Lawrence's faceless figures represent the way war takes life indiscriminately, especially affecting civilians. In almost the same color palette as Lawrence's series, Yohnka repeats this tactic

of using monster-like figures to depict war's false choices – or the absurdity of chance – with a beast-headed figure hosting a "shell game." The beast's expression of terror and aggression is echoed by Keefe's tyrannosaurus rex in *The King of the World*, with its mortar-infused legs looming over a fearful soldier.

Intergenerational themes and connections like these continue throughout *Making Meaning*. Viewers see the repetition of specific creative tactics used to visualize, externalize and socialize traumatic memories. Ultimately, these tactics highlight the political implications of trauma caused by war and military service.



Richard Olsen, *Stand Solidly Now*, 1969.

### Repeating Symbols (Skulls & Targets)

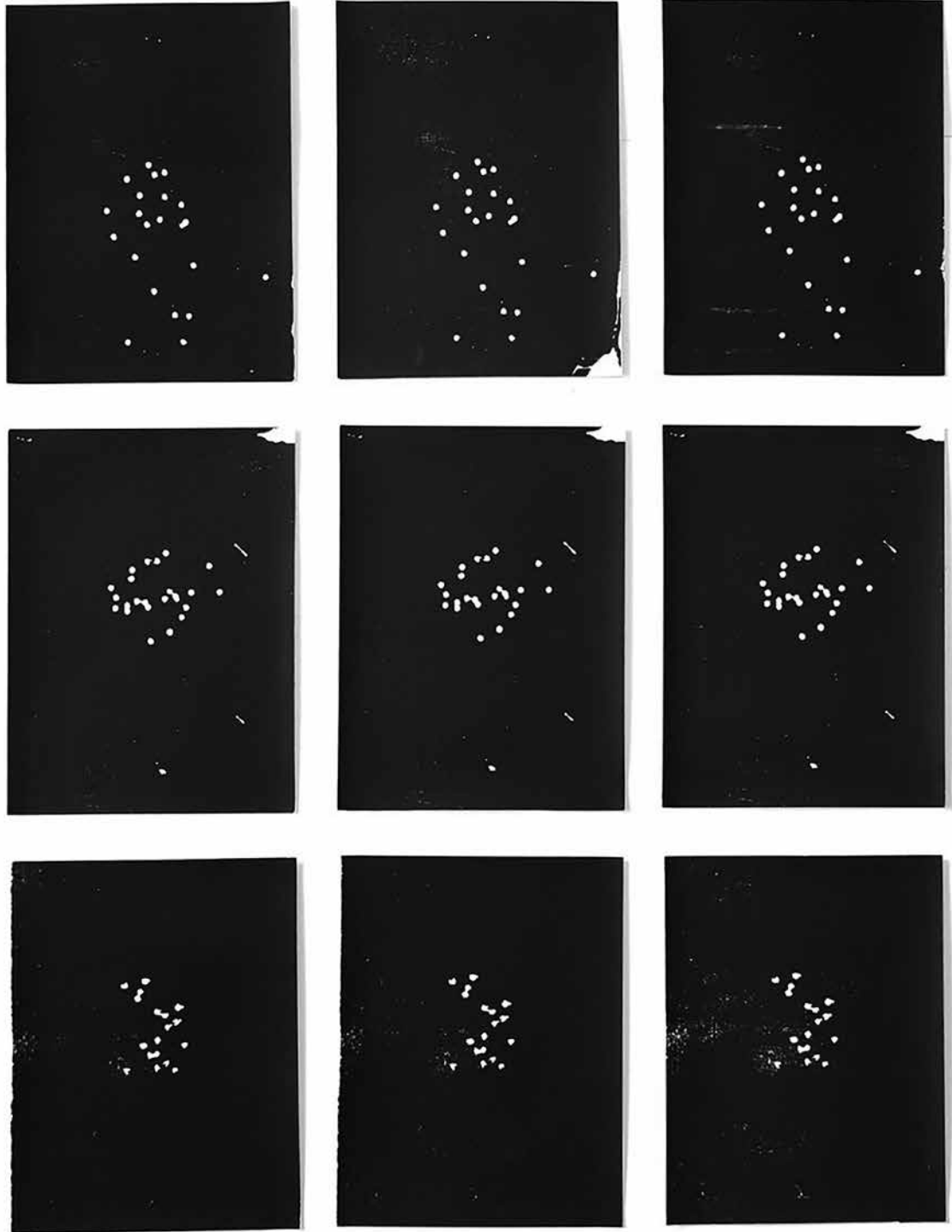
Lawrence's use of skulls to symbolize the deaths of his doomed subjects is a tactic repeated by Vietnam veteran Rick Bartow in *A view across the river for V. Vet and his heart attack because he couldn't talk and no one would listen anyway* (1987). Vietnam veteran Randolph Harmes also incorporates the skull symbol in *Ritual Suicide Mask* (1979). In each of these works (featured in *Making Meaning's* second gallery) the subjects' tortured faces are dissolved into skulls. Predating these works is World War II veteran and American pop artist Jasper Johns' *Skull* (1973), a print edition using the same graphic symbol. In a more cynical gesture, Michael Kelley's *Skull* (1978) (featured in the third gallery) presents a realistic rendering of two soldiers holding a skull of their supposed enemy. Beside Kelley's artwork viewers see Robert Morris's *Untitled (Firestorm)* (1982). In this massive charcoal drawing, an abstracted skeleton subject slowly emerges from a black and gray field of gestural marks.

The target symbol, often featuring crosshairs or shot patterns, also frequents the artwork of veterans. Similar to the use of skulls, the target symbol suggests an ominous fate – that of “the targeted.” One example is *Stand Solidly Now* (1969) by Vietnam veteran and American artist Richard Olsen (featured in the third gallery). With a conceptual twist, Iraq War veteran Amber Hoy's *Entrenched Series, Zero Target Data* (2014) uses the back of old practice targets to allude to the process of being trained to kill, with each successive plate representing an improved shot grouping. In this work the target itself is not visible – just a tighter and tighter constellation of bullet holes.

### Collage

Hoy's *Zero Target Data* also incorporates collage, representing a layered truth: a soldier's humanity is questioned as one achieves proficiency in killing. Many veterans have used collage to examine the layered complexities of their military experiences. Korean War veteran Ralph Arnold's *Who You/Yeah Baby* (1968) (featured in the third gallery) uses collage to depict military service. Uncle Sam looms large over suggestive male models surrounding him, representing the complexities and tensions of homosexuality in relation to military service (Arnold used collage extensively in his art to show the intersections and layers of identity and politics).

In a similar approach – however through a completely different medium – Air Force veteran Jessica Putnam-Phillips collages decals and drawings in her ongoing series of elaborately decorated ceramic platters *Untitled* (2013 to –) (featured in the first gallery). She plays off tropes of military service and what she describes as “women's



Amber Hoy, *Entrenched Series, Zero Target Data*, 2014.



Jessica Putnam-Phillips, *Untitled*, 2013 - Ongoing.



Otto Dix, #19 Dance of Death 1917 (Dead Man Heights): The War (Der Krieg), 1924.

supposed role in society: to serve." Similar to Arnold's work, Putnam-Phillips pushes back on the dominant masculine framework assumed in the military, raising questions about identity and who inhabits different spaces, specifically in relationship to the body. In *Black Vets* (1983) (featured in the second gallery), Vietnam veteran Ulysses S. Marshall also attempts to alter societal norms and challenge assumptions through collage. Marshall raises questions of who American society considers to be a veteran. His depiction of Black veterans in prison garb positioned in front of prison bars, represents the criminalization of the Black body. Collaged into the painting are military patches and service medals that seem to count for nothing in this instance.



Ulysses Marshall, *Black Vets*, 1983.

### Stark Black & White Compositions

The use of monotone and a black and white color palette is another common compositional choice found throughout many of the featured artworks. Perhaps this starkness relates to the striking brutality of war. World War I German veteran Otto Dix's 1924 print series *The War (Der Krieg)* (featured in the third gallery) is a prime example. The high contrast, black and white prints dramatize the trenches of World War I, expressing profound destruction and violence. Created almost a century later, Iraq veteran Matthew Deibel's *Sublunary* (2015) (featured in the center of the second gallery) is a series of delicate, stark white paper sculptures (human figures) highlighting the fragility and vulnerability of civilians in war. Deibel has remarked that he made the series in response to his involvement in uncovering a mass grave of Iraqi women and children. The stories of its victims were not covered by the media. Aply, the newspapers that make up the sculptures are bleached, as the victims' stories have gone untold.

### Color & Tension

In contrast to the above monotone artworks, Vietnam veteran Leo McStravick creates tension using color and motion in his composition *Falling Airman* (1975). Another example of a work in *Making Meaning* that uses color to create tension is Iraq War veteran Kelly Carter's *Consequences of Another* (2016). Carter, working a generation after McStravick, makes use of bright colors and landscape, pulling the viewer into a space of colliding architectures and mountains, confronting them with the horrors of sexual assault in the military. *The Count* (1978) by Vietnam veteran Michael Kelley incorporates bright red and yellow to bring attention to the three figures in the painting's foreground. Kelley's work, which refers to the colloquial expression "down for the count," raises questions of survivor's guilt by engaging the viewer with cynical riddles. A foregrounded soldier counts, while a fellow soldier lays face down,

mutilated and dead. The featured works by Keefe, Yohnka, and Lawrence (mentioned earlier) also use brilliant colors to create motion and intensify their depictions of loss and violence.

### CONCLUSION: Rethinking the Void of Trauma

*Making Meaning* demonstrates how veteran artists over the past century have intentionally (and unintentionally) repeated creative techniques to connect with viewers and highlight the politics underpinning traumatic memories. While these works certainly ask questions about the subjective nature of military experiences, expressing the violence and devastating loss of war on individuals, they also point toward the responsibility – and culpability – of greater society. As an extension of politics, war and military service are too often separated from everyday civilian experiences. *Making Meaning* is intended to remind viewers that war affects us all. It is meant to create knowledge and meaning out of veterans' traumatic memories so society might truly understand war's wide-reaching impact. This exhibition is not only an invitation to view artworks about war and the military in a new way (many of the more-famous featured works have never before been presented in the context of "veteran art"), but also to learn about the politics and histories that inspired these works. It is meant to further the discourse of intention and purpose within the emerging veteran art movement. Like civilian viewers, practicing veteran artists can learn from the tactics and strategies highlighted in *Making Meaning*. Veterans can learn about how other veterans have represented and deconstructed their own military experiences, picking up new strategies and techniques. Ultimately, art can be used to expose the irrationality, contradictions and politics of militarism, American exceptionalism and the implications of endless war, while helping us rethink the supposedly ineffable void of veteran trauma.



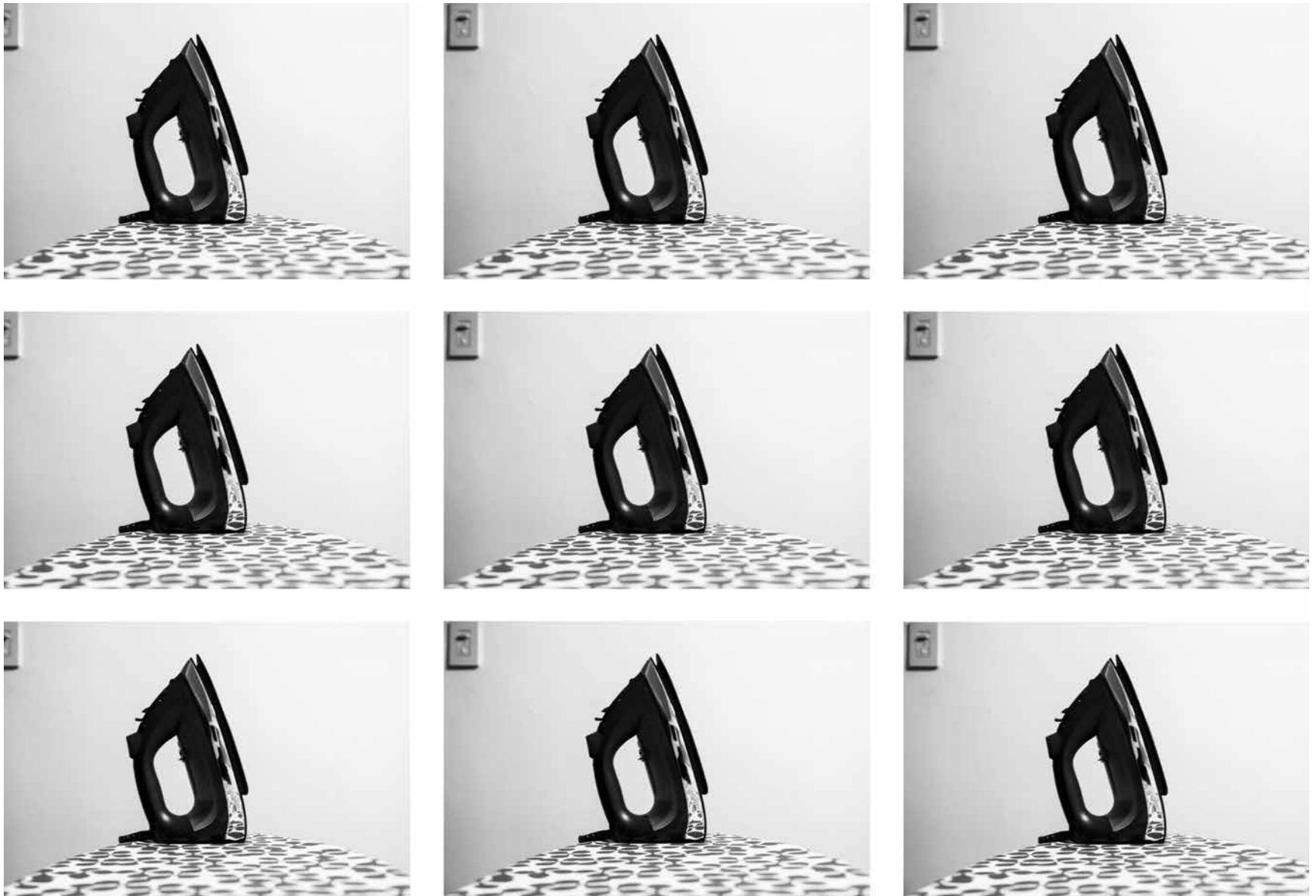
Otto Dix, #6 Wounded Man (Autumn 1916, Bapaume): The War (Der Krieg), 1924.



# OPEN/CLOSED

Featured Artists: Cao Ba Minh, Fanny Garcia, Karin Rodney-Haapala, James Razko, Brandon Secrest, Gerald Sheffield & Yeon J. Yue

By Amber Hoy, *Open/Closed* Curator



Karin Rodney-Haapala, *OCD*, 2013.

*Open/Closed* showcases veteran artworks that challenge the ways that first person narratives are used to express veteran identity. This exhibition was put together out of a desire to complicate and, at times, reject didactic approaches to veteran art that conflate the stories of combat and war-time deployment with the identity of the veteran upon returning to civilian life. Instead of explaining or reflecting solely on the experience of conflict, these artworks turn to the periphery of veteran life, to the ways in which veterans move through and experience spaces of the everyday, now colored by their time in the military.

For veterans, it is often hard to escape the model of the service member shown on television, in film, and in recruitment and patriotic marketing campaigns. This becomes even more complicated for veteran artists who are often chosen for art exhibitions because they are assumed to be able to speak directly to the experience of combat and veteran life. This experience, it is thought, inheres powerfully in wrenching moments and images of death, trauma, visits to the VA, medication, and wounded bodies. These images can be profane or poetic, barren or imaginative, routine or unexpected; but they all frame the veteran experience within the need to narrate, describe, and explain the horrors of combat and the traumas of post-military life to those who have not experienced it.

The artists included in this show – Fanny Garcia, Cao Ba Minh, James Razko, Karin Rodney-Haapala, Brandon Secrest, Gerald Sheffield and Yeon J. Yu – seek to expand the scope of the representation of war and, especially, of the post-war experience. Like Jasper Johns, Charles White and Robert Rauschenberg, they do this by turning to the allusive and, at times, mundane fragments of life (in this case, veteran life). Images of tiles, doorways, windows, color fields, and the small tender moments of family life present a mosaic of affective moments that, rather than creating a clear story, gesture toward what remains unrepresentable and unnarratable in veteran experience. Thus, these works are not linked by a singular way of viewing and making veteran art. Instead, each suggests the complex personal ways by which veterans piece together and narrate their lives from the fragments of the everyday that greet them upon their return.

Gerald Sheffield and James Razko both look at design and physical structures from places that the U.S. has occupied. Razko, in his series *The Compositions*, creates paintings composed of the damaged, decaying, and cracked images of tiles he has seen during his deployment in Iraq. He employs *trompe l'oeil* – literally translating to “fool the eye” – to create a hyper-realistic experience of three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional frame. Razko explains that his use of *trompe l'oeil* serves as a loose metaphor for the ways that trauma

and post-traumatic stress disorder are experienced and then re-lived. In lieu of explicitly depicting combat, Razko shows the consequences of conflict on the environments in which it takes place. While it remains unclear if the tile patterns are real or a pastiche of Middle Eastern motifs, Razko’s works are attempts to reconstruct, from memory, a hyper-realistic image of the relationship between the lives and spaces in which modern conflict unfolds, and the destruction brought to these places by combat. This decay is not framed triumphantly – rather, we are shown a loss of cultural heritage, even if the loss is not of one’s own culture.

In Gerald Sheffield’s works featured in this exhibition, we see the repeated form of an arched doorway. The frame opens onto a darkness, an unknown “other space,” that is ominous and haunting. The inaccessibility of the space beyond the arched door becomes, in these works, a stand-in for the psychological blacking out and blocking off of what cannot be represented. The stark qualities of Sheffield’s images provide contrast to that of Razko’s or Yue’s works.

Yeon J. Yue’s *Grey American Landscape* series depicts scenes of quiet domesticity, highlighting the lives of soldiers and their families. These intimate scenes recontextualize the image of the military family. As a Korean Air Force veteran, Yue served alongside American soldiers in Korea, where the military drafts its male citizens into

mandatory service for over two years. There he became interested in documenting American veterans and their families. The photographs are difficult to place in time because of the outdated nature of the housing, military buildings and hotel bedspreads. In the corners of these images, viewers find duffle bags packed, clothing piled up, moving boxes, empty and full bookshelves, and undecorated walls. Among these signs of passage and deployment, there are yellow ribbons and military photos. The weight of "the temporary," the exhaustion of movement, hangs over these spaces.

In Karin Rodney-Haapala's *OCD* and *Journal Entry*, the viewer is presented with an image of nine seemingly identical images of an iron. The journal entry states:

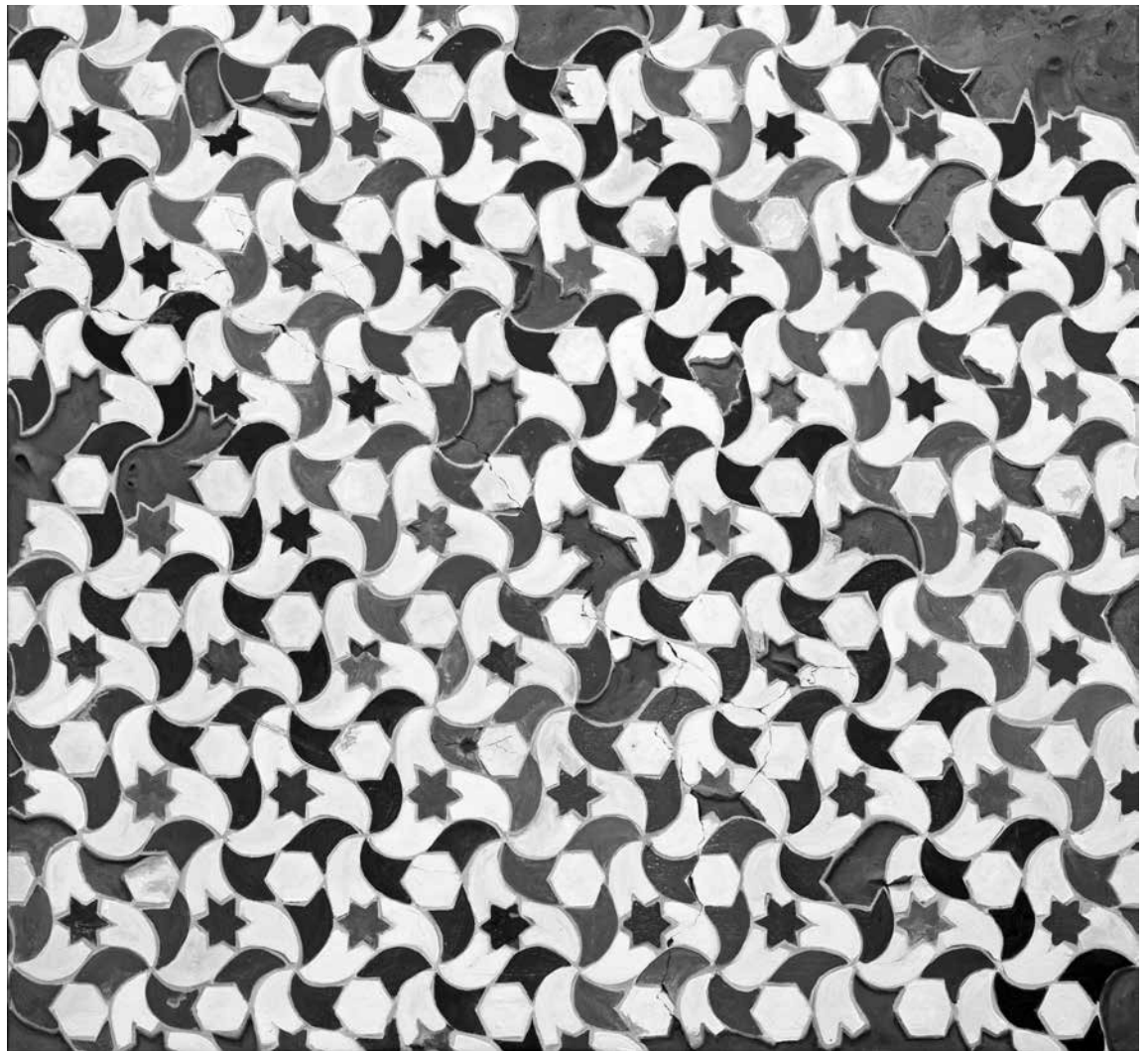
*I unplugged the iron. I have to check to see if it is unplugged  
again  
and again  
and again  
and again  
and again  
and again  
and again  
and again  
and again  
Nine trips home to see if the damn iron is unplugged.*

Unlike the other pieces in this show, Rodney-Haapala's work uses narrative to speak of the veteran experience; however, her narratives circle around the effects of war and deployment without speaking directly of the war. Although the trauma of military deployment is palpable in her need to check the iron over and over again, what we experience is the transformation of the domestic under the pressure of military conflict. Through this perspective, the work is imbued with an urgency arising from the embodiment of the lingering effects of combat in the everyday practices of the body. Repetition and return becomes a ritual, a way of reestablishing the facade of order and organization that is lost upon crossing the threshold into civilian life.

While there may be comparisons drawn between many works in the Triennial, *Open/Closed* stresses the variety of veteran responses to the return to civilian life. Highlighting these different ways of coping with "crossing the threshold" is not meant to isolate and exclude, but rather to show the vast and complicated nature of veteran art, and the way the artists employ many different mediums and subjects. Hopefully, this show acknowledges this multiplicity of experiences and responses, in turn shifting commonly accepted narratives about who veterans are and what kinds of art they make. This exhibition seeks to reopen questions about the nature of veteran art, and the complex and fraught intersection between war and poetic or visually sensuous work. *Open/Closed* pushes viewers to recognize veterans through the complexities of civilian life, rather than as hero or victim symbols.



Yeon J. Yue, *Grey American Landscape*, 2017.



James Razko, *Tile Composition 8*, 2016.

# CONVERGENCE

Featured Artists: Rodney Ewing, Ash Kyrie,  
Jessica Putnam-Phillips, & Ehren Tool

By Yvette Pino, *CONVERGENCE* Curator



Rodney Ewing, *Dry Season #3 Civil Rights Protest. Protestors Attacked by Water Cannon*, 2013.

The word “reconciliation,” weighted with religious overtones and preconceived notions, at its root simply means “to change.” One of the most beautiful things about reconciliation is that it cannot happen on its own. It must be offered and accepted. However, war, which by its very nature is defined by a multitude of experiences, complicates definitions of reparations and reconciliation, and confuses ideas of who is vanquished and victor. How we define these concepts, of course, affects how we recognize damage or injury and how we work towards building a more just society. If people are to find harmonization and connection, they must have a deeper understanding of war and reconciliation.

Whether on the battlefield or through people seeking civil rights and basic human needs, war requires, insists upon and determines reconciliation. The artists in the Michigan Central and South Galleries point to differing – at times conflicting – experiences on the same map, demonstrating war’s lasting effects on individuals and communities, while also creating a fuller account of how war changes our culture. The artworks themselves are instruments of change, as well as invitations to reflect upon and seek justice through simple acts of reconciliation.

Jessica Putnam Phillips’ delicate plates offer symbolic interpretations of the crucial work being done by the Organization of Women’s

Freedom in Iraq. Ash Kyrie’s social practice with Potters for Peace recognizes the essence of water as a necessary human need that cannot, and should not, be commodified. Ehren Tool invites the Chicago community to make cups, exchange stories, and remember those who have been affected by gun violence. Finally, Rodney Ewing’s paintings reveal African Americans’ complicated relationship with water, encouraging dialogue about divisive issues.

**Rodney Ewing** is an Army veteran who served in Iraq during Operation Desert Storm. Born in 1967 in Louisiana, Ewing now lives in San Francisco. He began his art practice before his military service. He earned his Bachelor’s of Fine Art in Printmaking at Louisiana State University in 1989 and Master’s of Fine Art in Printmaking at West Virginia University in 1992. His work explores topics of race, religion, and war. Refuting polarizations of “black and white,” “right and wrong,” “personal and other,” “historical and current,” Ewing’s work seeks to break down the power structures that rely on strict definitions, promoting only specific narratives and supporting the agendas of a select few.

The selected works from *Rituals of Water* included in *CONVERGENCE* promote a type of introspection that opposes apathetic disconnection from community. They promote individual accounts and memories over national mob mentality. His work creates an intersection where body and place,

memory and fact, are merged to reexamine human interactions and cultural conditions, imagining alternative narratives as a means of reconciliation. From the transatlantic slave trade, to droughts in Africa, to the current crisis in Flint, Michigan, this series of photo transfers, made with ink and salt on paper, provides connections to the African American community’s complicated relationship to water.

**Jessica Putnam-Phillips** is an Air Force veteran who deployed to the Middle East. When her commitment to the military ended, she changed career paths, earning a BFA from the University of North Carolina Wilmington in studio art. In 2013, she completed her MFA in Visual Arts from Lesley University, exhibiting her work as part of the Boston Young Contemporaries Exhibition and the New England Collective at the Galatea Gallery.

Putnam-Phillips uses traditional forms, materials and methods, combined with evocative imagery, to explore contemporary social and political issues. In *Refuge* she illustrates the “Rose of Jericho,” also known as the “resurrection plant,” in delicate sgraffito technique. The Rose of Jericho is a botanical wonder, with its interlocking, elongated stems that allow it to survive extended periods without vital life support systems. During episodes of drought, the tendrils dry and curl up, allowing the wind to carry them through the



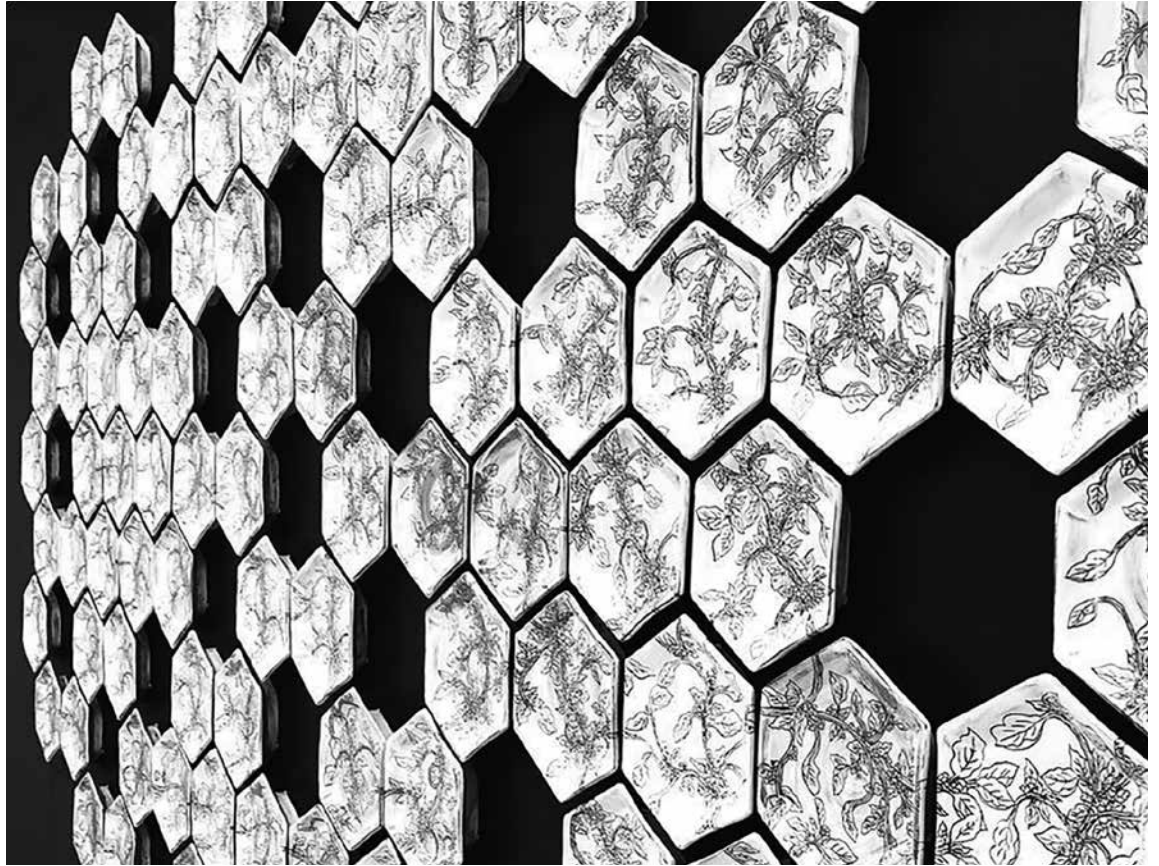
desert like a tumbleweed. Just one drop of water encourages the plant to open up and thrive again; but it is always prepared to face the next drought. The intricate botanical illustrations in *Refuge* reach from plate to plate, entwining them together – a symbol representing the work of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq. Each element forms a vast network, able to function on its own, but strengthened when connected.

**Ash Kyrie** is a Wisconsin native born in 1980 and an Army National Guard veteran. He deployed to Nasiriyah, Iraq in 2003. In 2007, he earned his Bachelor's of Fine Arts from University of Wisconsin, and in 2011, he earned his Master's of Fine Art in Comparative Cultural Studies from Ohio State University. He is a 2018 Original Warrior at the National Veterans Art Museum in Chicago, IL and has been the Co-Chair of the Art Committee at the National Veterans Art Museum since 2012.

Kyrie's work featured in *CONVERGENCE* examines the way an essential resource – water – has been monetized and violently extracted from the Earth, in complete disregard to all life. In *Water*, he contests the claim of Nestle Inc.'s CEO Brabeck-Letmathe that "it is extreme to consider water a human right." Kyrie's installation reflects his unyielding belief that water should not be commodified, and that access to clean, safe drinking water is in fact a human right. For this work of social practice, he collaborated with Potters for Peace, a U.S.-based non-profit that works with subsistence potters in Central America and also helps establish factories around the world to produce ceramic water filters. Working with a Potters for Peace cooperative in Nicaragua, *Water* exhibits ceramic filtration devices they made collaboratively. Coating the finished ceramic filters with colloidal silver ensures 99.88% percent of waterborne disease agents are removed. The filtration devices make safe drinking water through a low-tech and low-cost system.

**Ehren Tool** was born in 1970 in Charlestown, SC and raised in South Central Los Angeles. He is a Marine Corps veteran who served in the 1991 Gulf War and as an Embassy Guard in Rome and Paris. Tool's work is heavily influenced by his service in the Marine Corps and his return to the civilian world. He received his BFA from the University of Southern California in 2000 and his MFA in 2005 from the University of California at Berkeley. He often describes his work by saying, simply, "I just make cups." Giving away more than 20,500 cups since 2001, Tool hopes that people will spend time with his work, confronting the uncomfortable and often graphic depictions on his cups. In doing so, Tool wants viewers to locate their place in uncomfortable realities, where civilian and military cultures "collude and collide."

His vessels often symbolize people, and during the Veteran Art Summit on May 2-5, 2019, Tool welcomed members of the Chicago community who have been impacted by gun violence to create additional cups to add to the 200 already on exhibit. The cups are, in part, layered with imagery from photos and cultural ephemera about gun violence lent to the artist from the Chicago community. The project highlights the complex realities of finding "home" in the Chicago civilian experience, drawing connections to experiences of war through the cups. Each shelf in Tool's installation holds a specific number of cups. These numbers correlate with the magazine round capacity of the most frequently used guns in Chicago violent crimes: the 9mm and .38 handguns. Shelves holding a single cup represent the one bullet – one small piece of lead – that can profoundly change, or end, a person's life.



Jessica Putnam-Phillips, *Refuge*, 2019.



Ehren Tool, *Gun Violence Memorial Cups*, 2019.

# VETERAN MOVEMENTS: SEEKING JUSTICE & IMAGINING REPARATIONS



Photographer unknown. Veterans for Peace participate in Standing Rock protest, 2017.

*Veteran Movements* looks at the inspiring – though often unacknowledged – history of veteran activism. Beyond military service, veterans have long taken action in service of their communities, seeking justice and making peace. To highlight this history, *Veteran Movements* includes three thematic sections: *Dignity*, *Survival*, and *Community Reparations*. Each section features key moments, figures, and organizations, emphasizing what veterans have fought for beyond their military service. A fourth section, *Reclaiming and De-weaponizing*, focuses on military tactics veterans have incorporated into their activism. A fifth section features a wall of posters and broadsides produced by (or in collaboration with) veteran movements.

The materials and history displayed in *Veteran Movements* provide just a glimpse of the long and powerful legacy of veteran activism. This exhibition is meant not only to provide context for the artwork featured across the NVAM Triennial, it's also meant to spark further research and discussion – by both veterans and civilians – on veterans' historic and contemporary contributions to social justice and political movements.

## DIGNITY

*Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...*  
– Universal Declaration of Human Rights

For many veterans, what they experienced while serving in the military – both the positive and the negative – has given them a deeper sense of justice and inspired them to take action. There is a long legacy of veterans standing up for the inherent

dignity and rights of all people: from Native American World War I veterans fighting for full citizenship, to Black World War II veterans fighting for civil rights in the Jim Crow South, to today's deported veterans fighting for U.S. citizenship.

### Native American Citizenship

Although Native Americans were not legally citizens when the United States entered World War I, more than 12,000 were drafted or volunteered for military service to fight in the war. Many joined in hopes that their service would encourage the government to grant them full U.S. citizenship. Just like African-American troops who hoped that fighting for democracy overseas would help them gain civil rights at home, Native Americans too believed that military service should lead to acceptance within the population they fought for.

Native Americans brought highly useful communication skills to the U.S. military in World War I. The Choctaw telephone squad (an early iteration of "code talkers") helped keep sensitive information from the Germans by using their language (Choctaw) to pass information. It wasn't until 1924 when the American Indian Citizenship Right was passed that broad citizenship was granted to Native Americans – though in some states they

were still barred from voting until 1957. Notably, in 2019, construction begins on the National Native American Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

*We were forbidden to talk Navajo language up to World War II. And here what they did for the war is the language, the Navajo language. Now it is emphasized that the Navajo language be taught at all schools on the Navajo reservation...the United States government was trying to separate us from our reservation, they had plans to send us out on relocation...but we all came back to the Navajo reservation and tried to stay with the culture.*

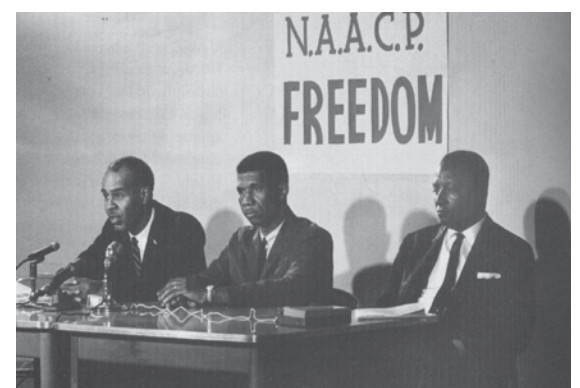
– Sam Smith, Code Talker, Marine Corps, from the Library of Congress

### Civil Rights

After fighting for liberty abroad, many African American World War II veterans returned home to face racial injustice in America. This was especially true for those living in the South under Jim Crow laws, which prevented African Americans from voting. This oppressive treatment prompted many African American veterans to organize some of the first voter registration drives and help build an emerging Civil Rights Movement. The many



Harris & Ewing. Native American placing flowers on Tomb of Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery, 1927.



Photographer unknown. Medgar Evers speaking at NAACP civil rights event, ca. 1960s.

African American veterans who joined the fight include Medgar Evers, who became a leader within the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Amzie Moore, who worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Army Lieutenant Colonel John Boyd, a well-regarded military strategist, once said, "... if it wasn't for the black Soldiers who came back from World War II and the Korean War and lent their expertise to the cause, Dr. King and the other ministers would not have been able to effectively organize as they did."

#### LGBTQ Rights

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell," refers to the official United States policy on military service by gays, bisexuals and lesbians, instituted by the Clinton Administration on February 28, 1994. The policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members or applicants, while barring openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons from military service. Prior to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," gays and lesbians were prohibited from serving in the military. Thanks to the efforts of the veteran community, the landmark federal statute "Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010" was enacted in December of that year. This act allows gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to serve openly in the United States military. Activism by LGBTQ veterans during the course of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" helped set the stage for future movements by the LGBTQ population.

#### Gender Equality

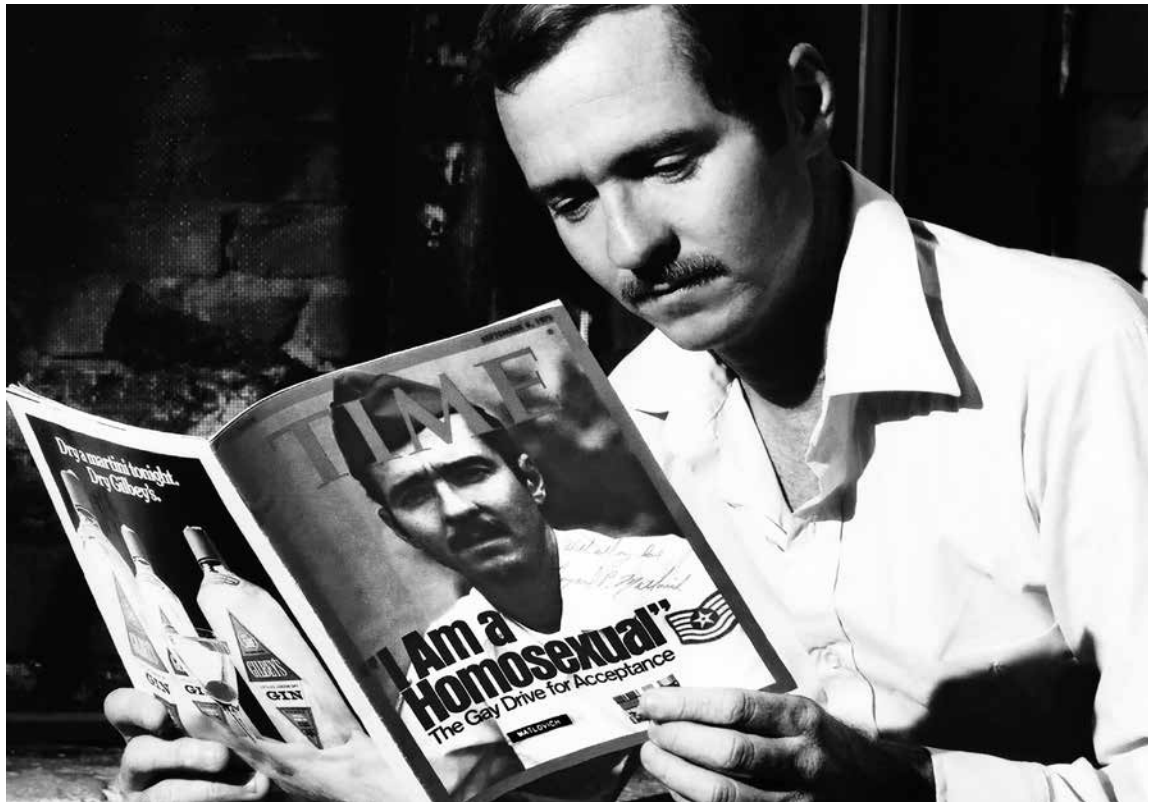
The Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) was founded in 2007 as a member-driven community that advocates for the individual and collective needs of servicewomen. To date, SWAN has played a major role in shaping the outcome of many important issues affecting women in the service, including opening all military jobs to women and holding sex offenders accountable to the military justice system. The network continues to work on eliminating barriers to disability claims for those who have experienced military trauma and expanding access to a broad range of reproductive health care services.

#### Trans Inclusion

On July 26, 2017, President Donald Trump announced that transgender people would no longer be allowed to serve in the U.S. military. On August 1, 2017, the Palm Center research institute released a letter signed by 56 retired generals and admirals opposing the proposed ban on transgender military service members. The letter stated that, if implemented, the ban "would cause significant disruptions, deprive the military of mission-critical talent and compromise the integrity of transgender troops who would be forced to live a lie, as well as non-transgender peers who would be forced to choose between reporting their comrades or disobeying policy." On March 23, 2018, President Trump officially banned transgender and transsexual people with current or previous gender dysphoria from serving in the U.S. military.

#### Military Service to Citizenship

The organization Green Card Veterans works closely with the larger veteran community to address and advocate for the rights of non-citizen U.S. service members, veterans and their families, and Gold Star families. Formed in 2017, Green Card Veterans fights for those who are at-risk or under an order of deportation, striving to give their disenfranchised veteran brothers and sisters, as well as their families, a fighting chance and a voice. Their ultimate goal is to end the exile of veterans and repatriate veterans who have been deported, through community organizing, advocacy, and research.



Photographer Unknown. Leonard Matlovich reads the *Time* article about himself, ca. 1975.



Jeff Sheng. The faces behind transgender troops' struggle for acceptance, 2019.



April Arreola. Protest at the San Ysidro-Tijuana border port of entry, San Diego, 2010.

## SURVIVAL

Service members and veterans do not only fight for survival on the battlefield, but also on military bases and at home. Military sexual trauma, moral injury, post traumatic stress disorder, drug addiction, homelessness and suicide are just some of the challenges many face. However, veterans and service members have long taken action to address these issues, often through self-organizing. For the many who have spoken out and worked towards ending these problems, survival – both for oneself and the community – becomes an empowering political act.

### AIDS Crisis

Veterans have directly impacted and helped shape disability rights legislation. Over the last 100 years, disabled veterans have fought for better treatments for PTSD, MST (Military Sexual Trauma), AIDS and more. As of 2010, the Veterans Health Administration (VA) has been the largest single provider of HIV treatment in the United States, providing care for more than 24,000 veterans living with HIV. Clarence Fitch, a Marine who served in the Vietnam War, became an icon for veterans living with AIDS through his activism with Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).

*People started trying to educate themselves about how the war started, where the war was going...for the first time we were really looking at the enemy not so much as the enemy, but as another minority...the war in Vietnam was not stopped by politicians, the war in Vietnam was stopped by people getting out into the streets and saying this is wrong.*

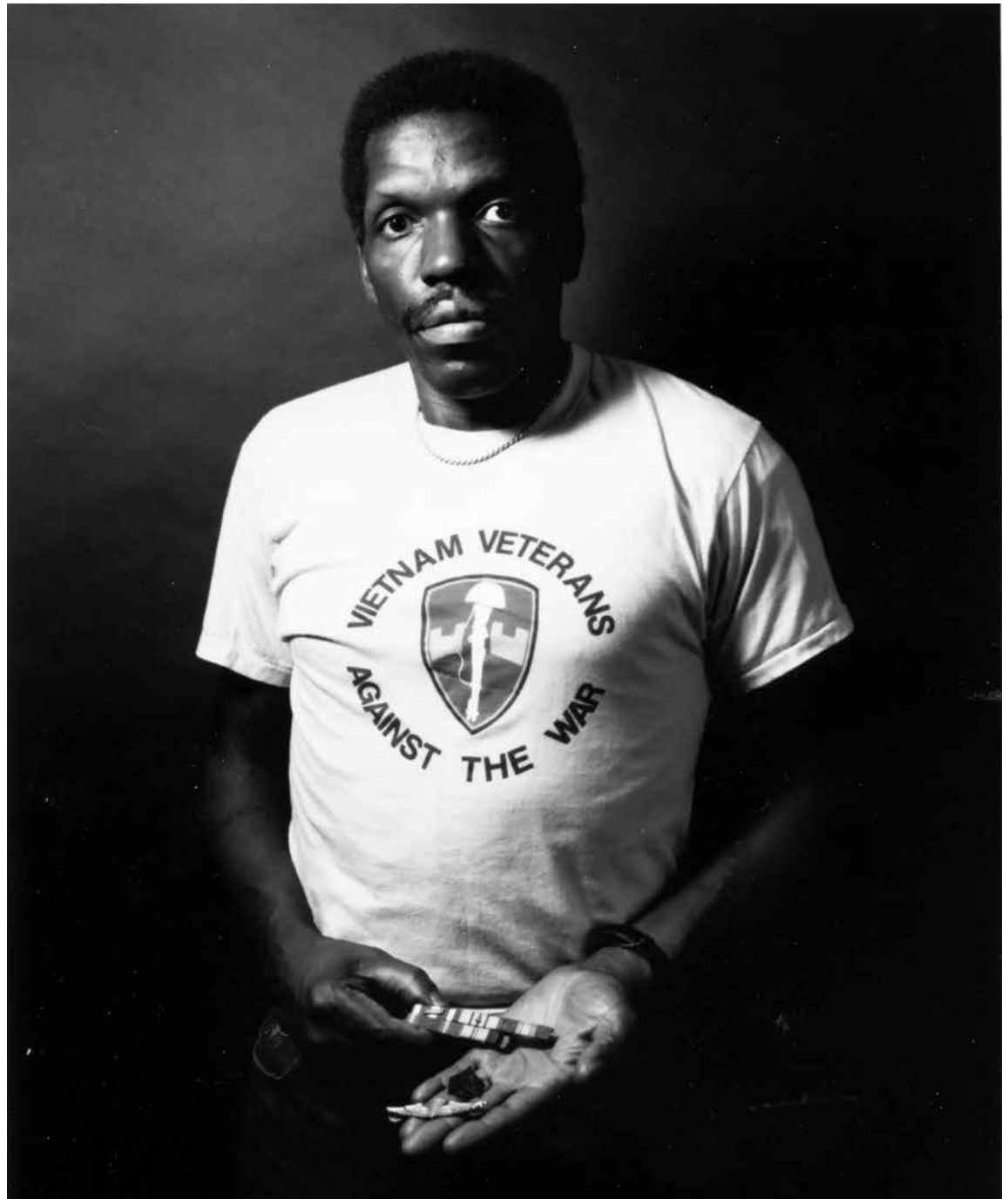
– Clarence Fitch, *Another Brother* documentary

### Right to Heal

The Right To Heal Campaign was started by veterans on the tenth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, with intentions of holding the U.S. government responsible for the damaging effects of the Iraq War on service members and civilians. The campaign recognizes that the war is not over for those who served, as well as for Iraqi civilians who continue to grapple with various forms of injury, trauma and displacement. In a joint initiative with Iraqi human rights organizations, the veterans have demanded that the real impacts of the war be assessed and concrete action be taken towards providing reparations and rehabilitation.

### Sexual Assault

The #MeToo movement is not only a phenomenon within the civilian population, but also within the military and veteran community. Veterans who have survived sexual assault while serving – Military Sexual Trauma (MST) – are more likely to experience stress, depression and other mental health issues, leading to higher rates of substance abuse and difficulty finding work after discharge. Breaking the stigma of talking about MST encourages survivors to seek assistance, while also helping to mitigate challenges others may face when they too decide to come forward. For example, in March of 2019, Senator Martha McSally, the first woman to fly in combat, testified before the U.S. Senate about being raped by a superior officer while serving, as well as other MST she endured. This has inspired others to share their experiences. MST-related activism (such as pushing for better training programs), as well as sharing personal experiences, marks a first step towards equity and justice.



William Short. Clarence Fitch was an inspiration to hundreds of young people who witnessed his strength, resilience, and clarity of vision, ca. 1980s.



Photographer unknown. Operation Recovery March Washington D.C., Veterans Day, 2010.

## IMAGINING REPARATIONS

Veterans have taken responsibility for the wars they helped perpetrate. They have taken action to compensate people for the violence that has decimated families and communities, destroyed fertile lands and ruined infrastructures. Vietnam Veterans Against the War advocated for victims of diseases caused by Agent Orange use in Vietnam. Afghanistan veterans have gone back to the country where they once fought, to support schools there. Iraq Veterans Against the War have called for reparations for the Iraqi people. These demands and efforts are often made in hopes of inspiring all U.S. citizens to take responsibility for the destruction and instability caused by wars waged in their name.

*War itself is a crime. Yet a war crime is more and other than war. It is an atrocity beyond the usual barbaric bounds of war. [...] Deliberate destruction without military purpose of civilian communities is a war crime. The use of certain arms and armaments and of gas is a war crime. The forcible relocation of population for any purpose is a war crime. All of these crimes have been committed by the U.S. Government over the past ten years in Indochina. An estimated one million South Vietnamese civilians have been killed because of these war crimes. A good portion of the reported 700,000 National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese soldiers killed have died as a result of these war crimes and no one knows how many North Vietnamese civilians, Cambodian civilians, and Laotian civilians have died as a result of these war crimes.*

— William Crandell, 199th Brigade, Americal Division; 1971 Winter Soldier Investigations

### Iraq & Afghanistan Reparations

Since the founding of Iraq Veterans Against the War in 2004, the organization has fought for “reparations for the human and structural damages Iraq has suffered.” IVAW’s mission later expanded to include other countries the U.S. military has occupied. To this day, IVAW (now called “About Face: Veterans Against the War”) continues to emphasize the importance that all Americans take responsibility for the wars waged in their name, in a push towards restorative justice. By partnering with organizations like Afghan Peace Volunteers, Afghans for Peace, and The Islah Reparations Project, veterans in the U.S. have helped support projects and programs created by these groups, in an effort to help foster peace and nonviolence.

### Agent Orange Reparations

Although the U.S. now provides benefits to U.S. veterans who were exposed to the harmful defoliant chemical Agent Orange, the same aid is not offered to the Vietnamese who were also exposed. Vietnam Veterans Against the War began advocating for both American and Vietnamese victims in 1971 and continues this fight to the present day. Although the U.S. military no longer uses Agent Orange, the effects of its use in Vietnam 50 years ago still significantly affects the Vietnamese people and the environment.



Photographer unknown. Annie Bailey at Agent Orange settlement hearings in 1984, 1984.



## Stop Sexual Assault in The Military!



“I said, ‘I can’t do it. I can’t go.’ I looked at my mom and I told her, ‘I can’t go.’ And she said, ‘Seriously?’. I just felt—my heart was pounding, and I felt like I was just frozen. I think I kind of stuttered when I said, ‘I can’t do it.’ It was hard to get the words out.”

—Specialist Suzanne Swift, in 2006, on her decision to go AWOL before her redeployment to Iraq, where she had been sexually assaulted by three men in her command. She was apprehended and imprisoned briefly in January 2007. She remained on active duty until 2009 and has been active in anti-war and anti-rape protests.



One third of women in the military are sexually assaulted. The military has diagnosed this as Military Sexual Trauma. According to the VA, more than 48,000 female veterans screened positive for military sexual trauma in 2008.



## STOP THE DEPLOYMENT OF TRAUMATIZED TROOPS



— YOU ARE NOT ALONE —

## RECLAIMING & DE-WEAPONIZING

There is a long history of veterans using skills and tactics they learned in the military to support social justice and political movements. For example, in 1932 a desegregated group of thousands of veterans set up a military-style encampment in Washington D.C., to nonviolently demand fair compensation for having fought in World War I. This marked the first occupation of the National Mall area of the nation's capital. In the following decades, this tactic would be used by other movements, from the Poor People's Campaign to Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Most recently, veterans from around the country traveled to South Dakota to join the Standing Rock Sioux at their encampment blocking the Dakota Access Pipeline, to help protect indigenous lands.

### Bonus Army Movement

In the summer of 1932, the "Bonus Expeditionary Force," made up of some 40,000 marchers (mostly U.S. World War I veterans, their families and supporters) gathered in Washington, D.C. to demand fair compensation for the veterans' World War I service. The group's name was a play on "American Expeditionary Force," the World War I allied coalition organized by the United States. The so-called "bonus" referred to service certificates – money – that had been promised to them in 1924 by Congress (after much advocacy and activism), to help match the pay their civilian counterparts had earned during the war. The Great Depression had plunged many veterans into poverty and unemployment, and keeping the money locked up in the certificates frustrated them even more (the

certificates couldn't be redeemed until 1945 – no doubt many veterans would have been deceased by then). After a series of failed legislation proposing immediate payment, the 1932 "Patman Bonus Bill" is ultimately what motivated the massive Bonus Army mobilization. Upon arriving in the capital, the veterans built a military-style encampment and temporary housing units along the Anacostia River, as well as occupied sections of the city itself. In the coming weeks, after the Patman Bonus Bill got voted down, these camps would get shut down by President Hoover's order, and the veterans and supporters routed out of the city by the U.S. Army. But veterans kept returning to Washington, pushing for redemption of the certificates. Finally, in 1936, the Bonus Bill was passed and veterans received compensation. This legislation would lay the groundwork for the 1946 G.I. Bill, which provided education, housing and other benefits for service members returning from World War II (and future generations of veterans too).

### Dewey Canyon III

Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) was started in New York City in 1967 when six Vietnam veterans marched together in a peace demonstration. The organization, originally founded to oppose the Vietnam War, continues to fight for peace and justice over 50 years later.

In April of 1971, hundreds of VVAW occupied Washington D.C. for five days, in a campaign they called "Operation Dewey Canyon III" (a play on "Operation Dewey Canyon II," a series of secret military invasions of Laos by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces). Like the Bonus Army before them, VVAW established a military encampment in the city;

however, this time the veterans set up in the middle of the National Mall. Over the five-day protest, the veterans testified to Congress and led a series of demonstrations in opposition to the ongoing war.

### Standing Rock

The Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, located in North and South Dakota, is among the largest Native American reservations in the United States. In 2016, despite tribal opposition, construction began there on the Dakota Access Pipeline (owned by Energy Transfer Partners), which had been rerouted to cross indigenous lands and pass under the upper Missouri River, the reservation's primary water supply. In response, self-proclaimed "Water Protectors" – made up of Standing Rock Sioux youth, elders and others – established a protest camp in the path of the pipeline. Over the coming months, over 200 tribes from around the world pledged solidarity and joined the struggle. Then in November, after a series of standoffs with police and pipeline security forces led to injuries of Water Protectors, thousands of veterans mobilized and travelled to the reservation to support the cause. The veterans not only brought donations of supplies, but also brought military skills, however repurposing their knowledge for the nonviolent struggle.

*There were so many veterans [at Standing Rock] of various eras, with a lot of military skills and training being repurposed and put to use. The work wasn't focused on war-making, but on peace-making.*

– Eli Wright, Iraq War veteran and anti-war activist



Photographer unknown. Vietnam Veterans Against the War at Medgar Evers' grave, ca. 1971.

# ERIC J. GARCIA: THE BALD EAGLE'S TOUPEE

Curated by Julie Rodrigues Widholm & Mia Lopez

In the exhibition *Eric J. Garcia: The Bald Eagle's Toupee* cartoons, sculptures, animations, murals, and a video game critique the United States government and military. Garcia uses satire to decry what he views as the poor treatment of veterans, Mexican-Americans, and other marginalized people.

*The Bald Eagle's Toupee* features a site-specific mural in which the artist reflects on his experience as a young recruit, from his first military haircut to witnessing the psychological indoctrination of his peers. Employing satirical caricature, illustrations of a corrupt Uncle Sam or villainous bald eagles are stand-ins for the government and those in power. The mural is accompanied by a soundtrack of war and combat sound effects including audio from army recruitment videos and theme songs of television shows such as *G.I. Joe* and *The A-Team* that the artist watched growing up. He recalls being

exposed to war and the military from a young age, in popular culture and in his own backyard, and playing with toy guns and staging battles with childhood friends. In the sculpture *War Nest* (2016) Garcia considers the constant presence of violence in his life, using wooden guns to demonstrate the proliferation of gun violence in American culture. The gallery also features new video projections that animate the artist's signature drawings. In 2018 Garcia began a collaboration with Steve Ciampaglia and Kerry Richardson of the Plug-In Studio to create a video game. The exhibition includes a trailer for the forthcoming game, *Discharged*, that disrupts the pro-military narrative dominant in mainstream video games and paints a somber picture of a combat veteran's experience returning home. Garcia has also designed a foldout poster featuring new and previously unpublished political cartoons as well as a selection of older work.

**Eric J. Garcia** was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1977. After four and a half of years of service in the United States Air Force (1997-2002) he received a BFA from the University of New Mexico and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

*Eric J. Garcia: The Bald Eagle's Toupee* is on view at DePaul Art Museum April 25 - August 11, 2019. This exhibition is organized by DPAM Director and Chief Curator Julie Rodrigues Widholm and Assistant Curator Mia Lopez.



Eric J. Garcia, *War Nest*, 2010.

# REFLECTIONS ON RETURN TO THE BODY

BY Carlos Sirah, NVAM Triennial Performance Program Curator



Kiam Marcelo Junio, *Ascensum* from *Procession: Return to the Body*, 2019.

Throughout U.S. history, veterans returning home from war and military service have extended their bodies with intentional strategies of creating new spaces – new possibilities – for themselves and broader society. These new folds in the societal fabric challenge the status quo's relationship to understandings of race, class, and gender in the context of war and military service. Because of these veterans, the broader society (non-veterans & veterans alike) have had to contend with historical legacies of settler-colonialism and its vast consequences: the genocide of Native Americans, chattel slavery, U.S. imperialism and, of course, war and the many deaths that follow U.S. interventions.

The NVAM Triennial's performance program *Return to the Body* (which happened at the Veteran Art Summit, May 3 - 5, 2019) was guided by themes of relation, both as a curatorial and analytical posture/performance. "Relation," in this context, was informed by Caribbean theorist Édouard Glissant, whose work *Poetics of Relation* critiques territory (ontological, spiritual, political), and considers *Le Tout-Monde* ("The All-World"), the only world we share, the only world we inherit. In the spirit of Glissant, *Return to the Body* put into direct relation a set of bodies, peoples, and histories: Black, Red, Yellow, and Brown. Separately, these histories often contend with global power – whiteness – by centering that power. *Return to the Body* offered artists a framework by which

to re-orient relation, in turn re-orienting ideas of possibility.

The veteran artists in this performance program include former service-people from the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marines who, by way of performance and embodiment, continue to negotiate and revise many of the same strategies of creation utilized by veterans before them. They look to the past, as a way to interpret the present, as a mechanism and strategy to theorize futures.

## PROCESSION

Kiam Marcelo Junio, Joseph Lefthand, and Nicole Goodwin opened the performance program (and the broader Summit) with a multi-modal landscape procession. The hour-long *Procession: Return to the Body* was a deeply relational work that utilized Butoh, Objective Actions, and Public Intervention as strategies of performance in the institutional setting of the Chicago Cultural Center. The cohort of artists met for the first time in a virtual space, sharing ideas in a Google Hangout every week for three months before the opening of the NVAM Triennial and Veteran Art Summit weekend. Interestingly, the virtual space would mutate and manifest itself during the conversations, unintentionally offering a species of consideration and structures relation, even representing the interrogation of histories of

war and imperialism.

With collective and solo moments built into the structure of *Procession*, the artists invited participant-witnesses to proceed through the Chicago Cultural Center to view the performances. In *Ascensum*, Kiam Marcelo Junio crawled, tiptoed, marched, danced, swayed and stumbled, ascending the Center's north stairway. Rose petals fell from above. Junio, a ghost-like entity, painted in white, at times appeared as an ashen Statue of Liberty, as a nymphic trickster, other times as the embodiment of grief. Junio's primary (but not only) performative mode is Butoh, a Japanese form, which emerged in the aftermath of the United States' deployment of the atomic bombs, annihilating the cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, a catastrophic coda to the close of the Second World War. In this context, Junio's performance invited a consideration of space, broadly asking *who inhabits space?* Similar to the bombs' effects, this work also collapsed and reconfigured time.

Performed by former marine Joseph Lefthand, *Things are Certainly Beautiful to Behold, but to Be Them is Something Quite Different* activated objects in the Grand Army of the Republic Rotunda. Nine doors flank this room, which is just off the north stairway, where Junio simultaneously performed *Ascensum*. In the rotunda, natural light filters through a Tiffany dome, spilling in from above, while artificial light emanates from nine



square glass panels set in the floor. These panels served as “activators” for Lefthand’s objects: a rope, a ladder, a wood stump, a green apple, and gas masks. Between this artificial and natural light, Lefthand created a shamanic logic of absurdity.

At one moment in his performance, Lefthand, wearing a gas mask and dressed in all-white, interacted with witness-participants to reconstruct a nuclear family. He donned a gasmask on his son, as well as two adults from the audience, and placed this “family” upon one of the artificial light squares. He made adjustments to the family’s pose, then snapped a selfie using an iPhone taken from another audience member. In this liminal space between different species of light, between past and future, Lefthand, with trickster conviction, invited consideration of *family*, *destruction*, and *war*. Lefthand challenged notions of presence and participation, recalling the work of action-artists like Joseph Beuys, a former-Nazi turned anti-Nazi, whose alchemical work turned objects into rarefied opportunities for encounter and humanism in public spaces.

In Nicole Goodwin’s *My Body Tells a Story*, *My Body Yells a Story*, *I Am a Story Growing on Repeat*, the performance artist (Goodwin) lay on the floor sheathed behind white opaque fabric, which was suspended from the ceiling of the Yates Gallery. A portal-opening in the fabric presented possibilities: Goodwin might leave at any time, or witness-participants might enter. Each happened only once. An audio track, a recording of Goodwin reading her poetry, filled the room. During her performance, Goodwin’s plaintive and probing voice cut and echoed through the large space, with moans, yells, history. *My Body Tells a Story* ultimately conjured and declared presence.

Goodwin’s piece riffed on her previous performance, *Ain’t I a Woman?*, which shares its title with a 1851 speech by African-American abolitionist Sojourner Truth. Goodwin created *Ain’t I a Woman* to represent “...the alienation that I experience as a black woman and mother daily.” The appearance (or non-appearance) of the self is critical to understanding Goodwin’s work, which echoes the legibility and erasure of Black women’s labor. These concerns have remained constant throughout the last century, with origins in American chattel slavery, when Black women’s bodies were simultaneously seen and not seen. According to Glissant, it is a project of empire to render the world transparent according to empire’s demands: to name it or not, to forget it or not, to lay waste to it or not, to erase it or not. In this work, Goodwin enacts a strategy of refusal: she refuses the transparency rendered by the state, thereby claiming her right to opacity. Goodwin’s use of a space that challenged how people see (her), is a process which restores her agency, or at least mitigates the viewer’s ability to process (her) body through empire’s lens.

Through performance, this cohort of three artists – Junio, Lefthand and Goodwin – situated themselves both at (inside the Chicago Cultural Center) and as (embodiments and Actions of History) “sites of encounter.” They offered new, ephemeral spaces where ontological categories dissolve: e.g. human and animal, matter and spirit, secular and sacred, object and subject. These artists oriented themselves towards an aesthetic which engages cross-cultural and trans-racial analyses of war and empire.

## PERFORMANCE LAB

The Performance Lab and performance-focused Presentations at the Summit were conceived as a way to support the development of artists’ new or existing work, putting into relation all of the veteran artists in the performance program. Chicago-based dancer and choreographer Willyum LaBeija was awarded a residency to develop work at the Chicago Cultural Center prior to the Triennial and Summit. Artists Kiam Marcelo Junio, Joseph Lefthand,



Joseph Lefthand, *Things are Certainly Beautiful to Behold, but to Be Them is Something Quite Different*, from *Procession: Return to the Body*, 2019.



Nicole Goodwin, *My Body Tells a Story*, *My Body Yells a Story*, *I Am a Story Growing on Repeat*, from *Procession: Return to the Body*, 2019.



Nicole Goodwin, Kiam Marcelo Junio, & Joseph Lefthand, *Procession: Return to the Body*, 2019.

Nicole Goodwin, Hipólito Arriaga, and Anthony Torres gave fifteen-minute artist talks situating their work in the contexts of their respective disciplines and fields: spoken-word-theater, performance art, installation, and dance.

During the residency, LaBeija developed his work *I Don't Consent*, a dance piece that utilized spoken-word and music to explore themes of service, reparations, refusal, and trauma. At the Summit, LaBeija performed excerpts from this new work. LaBeija, a U.S. Army veteran, toured as a dance captain with the MWR (Morale, Welfare and Recreation) Soldier Show for two years during his service. His training includes classical and urban genres of dance, with an emphasis in vogue performance, a highly stylized dance form born out of Black Queer ball culture (rooted in themes of necessity, defiance, and survival). His aesthetic synthesizes experiences of injury and anxiety related to military service, while incorporating his post-service interest in vogue. Since 2011, Willyum is a current member of the Royal House of LaBeija.

## KEYNOTE PERFORMANCES

### **AMAL**

Hipólito Arriaga and Anthony Torres of the Combat Hippies performed excerpts from their work *AMAL*, which "delves into the impact of war on people of color who serve, as well as that of civilians from war-torn countries." The Combat Hippies believe that "[through] exploring the commonalities experienced in war, we can find common ground, build empathy, and foster a better sense of community." *AMAL* (which means "hope" in Arabic) is ambitious in its scope and its articulation of relation. The project considers the U.S. bombing of Puerto Rico in the 1950s, detention in Abu-Ghraib Prison, interviews with Syrian refugees, failure of U.S. policy in the wake of Hurricane Maria, and the reckoning of Puerto Rican soldiers fighting in the United States military.

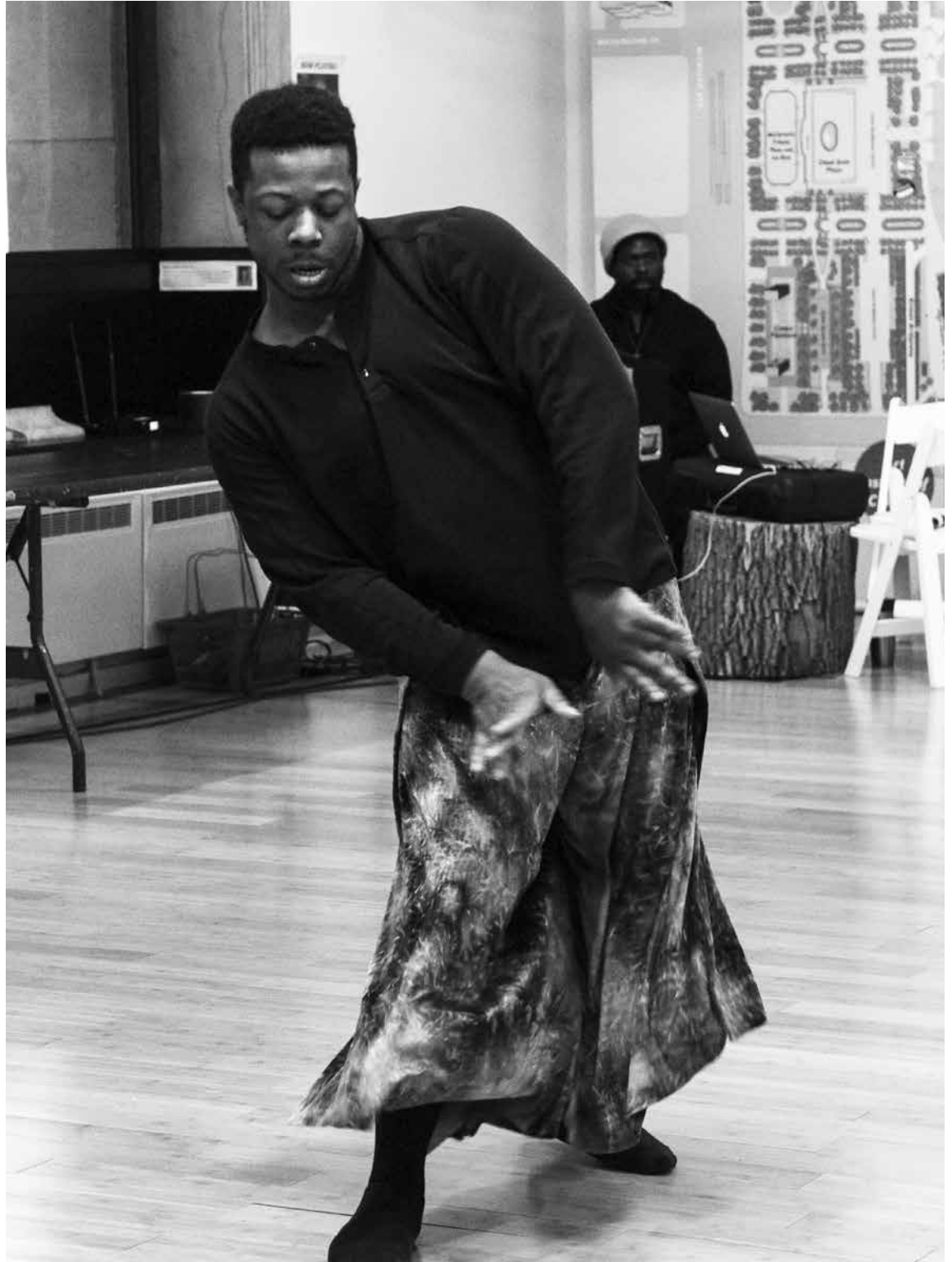
Their primary mode is spoken-word-theater, following the lineage of Puerto Rican and Black artists in New York in the late 1960s and 1970s, during and after the Vietnam War. In 1965, men of draft age in Puerto Rico were subject to the Selective Service Act. These men were called to fight in the U.S. military, although they had no representation in Congress. According to the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, "numbers show 48,000 Puerto Ricans participated in [the Vietnam War]." Catastrophe often reveals power relations, and much like the crisis and disaster of the Vietnam War, hurricane Maria revealed the disparate power relations between the U.S. and its island colony.

*AMAL* is meant to be experienced as a theater in the round performance, that sacred shape recalling not only Taíno and African histories, but also the radial motion of a hurricane. Performing excerpts from *AMAL* on the north staircase of the Center, the Combat Hippies brought humor and heartbreak to the venue, as a large audience gathered around them to watch.

### ***This Is not a Drill***

*This Is not a Drill* is one part of a suite of performances created by former marine Jefferson Pinder. In *This Is not a Drill*, Pinder and his ensemble isolate, slow down, abstract, revise and repurpose gesture and action. Pinder prepares Black bodies for attack and ambush, striving to develop visual power. Pinder builds a militia as a strategy for Black defense and survival, utilizing *repurposing* as a conceptual, methodological, and epistemological tool for liberation.

From Jefferson Pinder's website: "In the late summer and early autumn of 1919, violence and uprising erupted across the United States. Hundreds of Black lives were lost amid a transitory period of unrest and hostility that was named The Red Summer. As the nation marks a full century since then, we are in a new era of unrest. This



Willyum LaBeija, *I Don't Consent*, 2019.



Anthony Torres of Combat Hippies, *AMAL*, 2019.



Performer from *This Is not a Drill* by Jefferson Pinder, 2019.

summer [2019], Pinder is embarking on a classic American journey: a road trip to visit major sites of The Red Summer. He intends to bring into focus how much has changed since that summer – and how much has not.”

After World War I, over 100,000 Black veterans moved north, where they still encountered segregation, racism, and inequality – like 22-year-old veteran Randall Neal in Washington D.C., one of the first victims of The Red Summer violence. After the Great War, Black veterans formed unions, lodges, and mutual aid societies. In the wake of enduring tremendous violence in the Great War, at home they were also forced to use military training to defend their communities. Pinder researched Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Black Panther footage, as well as studying the co-relation of veteran identity with (and through) the Black Panthers and The Deacons of Defense. Historically, and presently, the U.S. has had a morbid fascination with the Black body as a site of death. Pinder reframes the Black body – or rather the ensemble of bodies – as a site of collective power, rather than reifying the besieged body as the primary site of consideration. He introduces strategies to see the *other* (or oneself) outside of powerless constructions.

Pinder's performance took place in Yates Gallery, which during the time of the performance was the dedicated home of a series of performances inspired by The Goat

Island Collective. The performance space was a reconstitution of the church gymnasium in which Goat Island's performances originally happened. The ritualized performance of *This Is not a Drill* is a live continuation of its own training: with each performance, the militia members (ensemble) become more martially proficient. The ongoing performances are part of the Red Summer Road Trip, travelling throughout the south during the summer of 2019. The performances will end in Chicago in a public performance on Lake Michigan, one hundred years after the death of Eugene Williams, who was stoned and drowned by white teenagers (the refusal of police authorities to investigate Williams' death ultimately prompted the 1919 riots in Chicago).

#### CLOSING PERFORMANCE

The performers of *Return to the Body* reimagined and redefined their own existences, along with the broader society's relationship to their existences. Re-contextualizing the body and its uses, *Return to the Body* manifested itself by isolating military gestures through sound, embodiment and other forms. In presenting their art, the performers operated within (and upon) a field of complex and shifting narratives and relationships, personal and collective histories.

At the end of the Veteran Art Summit, a large circle of chairs occupied half of the Grand Army of the Republic Hall. Summit participants sat reflecting on the new folds, contours, processions, and shapes they encountered in the exhibitions: those things that disturbed, that enlivened, that re-visioned the future. Based on the work of John O'Neil, founder of the Free Southern Theater, participants created a story circle, tying together experiences and themes from the Summit. Participants considered how veteran artist experiences and practices shared at the Summit have opened new possibilities for further veteran art discourses and future practices.

# TRIENNIAL EDUCATION GUIDE

Organized by Edgar Gonzalez-Baeza

We can foster understanding and empathy through education. This is important to remember especially when learning about a group as varied and complex as military veterans. Accordingly, in order to help viewers and participants understand *On War & Survival* and the context veteran artists work in, we have compiled discussion questions and a glossary of common terminology. Using this reference, we invite viewers to discover connections between their own experiences and identities and those of veterans, as a means of finding common ground.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Note: The questions below have been paired with a learning objective from either the Common Core Language Arts Standards, or the Visual Arts Standards for the State of Illinois, indicated by the codes at the end of each question.

### VISUAL ARTS/PERFORMANCE/SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

What connections can you make between the many social movements that veterans have been involved in over the past century and the artwork in these galleries? How do you see social injustices addressed visually? (VA:Cn11.1.I) –

How are the struggles that veterans endure conveyed in their artwork? How do those struggles relate to – or intersect with – the struggles that other minority communities experience? (VA:Re7.2.I) –

What are the trends, symbols, common elements and tropes that emerge as a result of World War I, repeating throughout subsequent artworks up to the present day? (VA:Re8.1.I) –

In what ways have veterans incorporated non-western cultural iconography, philosophies or enemy combatant imagery into their work? What is the overall tone of the work which incorporates these integrated images or philosophies? (VA:Cn11.1.I) –

How does the artwork of Kelly Carter or Ulysses Marshall inform what we commonly conceive of as the trauma which most veterans experience? How could the messages in their work be used to inform how we talk about trauma in other communities? (VA:Pr7.1.I) –

What issues do Cleveland Wright and Jacob Lawrence illustrate in their work? How often do we address the struggles of veterans' families in society at large? How could we better address and amplify the voices of those families? (VA:Pr7.1.I) –

How is Cleveland Wright's work in dialogue with Jessica Putnam Phillips' work, specifically regarding the roles of women at war, both abroad and after they come home? What are the unifying themes? How do these works diverge? (VA:Pr6.1.I) –

In what ways have routines and objects of everyday life been weaponized and used in war? How is that reflected in this artwork? How has military culture spread into society at large? How are these connections made more tangible by the Combat Hippies' performances and the paintings by Rodney Ewing? (VA:Pr6.1.I) –

### LITERATURE

Imagine that the speakers in "Maktoob" and "next to of course god america i" meet and have a conversation about World War I. Do you think they would share the same opinions about the war? Why or why not? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C) –

Members of the political activist organization Vietnam Veterans Against the War published collections of poetry addressing issues of racism, trauma, U.S. militarism and more. How might poetry serve as an effective means of dissent? (VA:Pr6.1.I) –

In "William Rivera, PFC" Anthony Aiello offers an example of how joining the army is sometimes used as an escape from bad circumstances. What is the significance of juxtaposing gang violence with state-sanctioned war? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5) –

# GLOSSARY

It's important to have a foundation of understanding when looking at artwork by veterans, especially when it's presented in an unusual context (or in a way not normally discussed in public). While you will be familiar with most of the terms below, *On War & Survival* presents these concepts in a way you may not be used to. Some will include the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition, as well as an alternative definition that is summarized, gleaned or synthesized from the composite experiences of artists, veterans and those who have gone through military training. Those without secondary definitions have been presented in a way that is specific to this exhibition.

**Art as Healing** - Art making is an activity which can be practiced as craft, or as a means of processing stressful or traumatic experiences.

**Art as Therapy** - Art making for many people is a calming and meditative activity. Many veterans turn to art making as a way to process the experiences they have gone through. Often when words fail, non-verbal expression such as art can communicate more precisely what an experience was like.

**Art Therapy** - Clinical treatment with a licensed professional in which art making is a tool for treatment; an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship.

**Collaboration** - To work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor.

**Community** - 1) A unified body of individuals. 2) A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

**Conscientious Objectors** - A service member or veteran who has refused to take up arms or commit violence in order to fight in a war. Historically, chaplains, certain religious groups (such as Quakers), and medical personnel are the most common examples of conscientious objectors.

**De-weaponizing** - 1) To remove weapons from a space, or region. The opposite of weaponization. 2) To actively remove the lethal elements of harmful thought processes. Service members are often inculcated with such thought processes during initial combat training.

**Dignity** - The quality or state of being worthy, honored, or esteemed.

**Displacement** - To expel or force to flee from one's home or homeland.

**Enemy** - 1) One that is antagonistic to another. 2) The designated target that you are willing to kill for your cause. Someone who you dehumanize and designate as "other" so that you are able to kill.

**G.I. Resistance** - The concerted actions and organizations led by service members in civil rights movements, war resistance, community services, and recognition of civil causes.

**Honor** - Good name or public esteem. To regard or treat someone with admiration and respect.

**Legitimacy** - 1) The quality or state of being accordant with law or with established legal forms and requirements. 2) A hierarchy of power relations used or invoked to justify conflict.

**Reclaiming** - 1) Rescuing something from an undesirable state. 2) Recovering something felt to be important, like an old identity, or one's humanity.

**Reconciliation** - 1) The restoration of friendship or harmony; the settling of differences. 2) Bringing together two disparate realities into a single coexisting truth.

**Reparations** - 1) Giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury. 2) Making amends through good faith gestures or monetary restitutions for an injustice a person or nation has committed.

**Respect** - 1) To consider worthy of high regard; to refrain from interfering with. 2) To treat others with dignity and expect others to do the same.

**Selfless Service** - Putting the needs of the nation and your subordinates ahead of yourself.

**Service** - An act of assistance; contribution to the welfare of others.

**Survival** - The continuation of life or existence.

**Trauma** - An emotional upset; a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury.

**Transformation** - The process of changing in form or shape.

**Veteran** - Someone who has served in the armed forces, regardless of whether they served in an armed foreign conflict or not.

**War** - 1) A state of (usually) open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations 2) "...the incredible artificial weather that Earthlings sometimes create for other Earthlings when they don't want those other Earthlings to inhabit Earth any more." - Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

# EXHIBITION LIST OF WORKS

## MAKING MEANING

### ROOM 1

Richard Yohnka, American (1957-1997), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*Shell Game*  
*Arcade Barker*  
Circa 1983, Oil on canvas

Jacob Lawrence, American (1917-2000), Coast Guard veteran, served during World War II  
*Playground: Hiroshima*  
*Street Scene: Hiroshima*  
*Family: Hiroshima*  
*People in the Park: Hiroshima*  
*Market: Hiroshima*  
*Man with Bird: Hiroshima*  
*Boy with Kite: Hiroshima*  
*Farmers: Hiroshima*  
1983, Eight screenprints on paper

David Keefe, American (b. 1980), Marine Corps veteran, served in the Iraq War  
*The King of the World*, 2016, Oil on canvas

Leo McStravick, American (b. 1943), Navy veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*Falling Airman*, 1975, Oil on canvas

Richard Olsen, American (b. 1935), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*The Fall*, 1964, Etching

Jessica Putnam-Phillips, American (b. 1973), Air Force veteran, served in the Middle East  
*Untitled*, 2013 - Ongoing, Ceramic

### ROOM 2

Matthew Deibel, American (b. 1980), Marine Corps veteran, served in the Iraq War  
*Sublunary*, 2015, Sculpted handmade paper

Ulysses Marshall, American (b. 1946), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*Black Vets*, 1983, Mixed media  
*Motherless Child*, 1983, Acrylic and crayon on paper

Ken Hruby, American (b.1938), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*War Trophy*, 1993, Sculpted wood

Rick Bartow, American (1946-2016), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*A view across the river for V. Vet, and his heart attack because he couldn't talk and no one would listen anyway*, 1987, Oil pastel on paper

Monty Little (b. 1983), Marine Corps veteran, served in the Iraq War  
*Usurp: Lincoln II*, 2015, Monoprint on paper

Jack Levine, American (1915-2010), Army veteran, served in World War II  
*Warsaw Ghetto*, 1969, Lithograph

Jasper Johns, American (b. 1930), Army veteran, served during the Korean War  
*Skull*, 1973, Screenprint

Randolph Harmes, American (b. 1944), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*Ritual Suicide Mask*, 1979, Wood, gauze, and paint

Kelly Carter, American (b. 1986) Army veteran, served in the Afghanistan and Iraq War  
*Consequence of Another*, 2016, Oil on canvas

H.C. Westermann (Horace Clifford "Cliff" Westermann) American (1922 - 1981), Marine Corps veteran, served in World War II  
*Port of Shadows*, 1967, Lithograph

### ROOM 3

Jesse Albrecht, American (b. 1977), National Guard veteran, served in the Iraq War  
*Abu G & Me & Jail*  
*Dog*  
*Pray for Peace*  
2005 - 2006, High-fired ceramic

Amber Hoy, American (b. 1986), Army veteran, served in the Iraq War  
*Spilt Milk*, 2015, Inkjet print

Otto Dix, German (1891-1969), German Army veteran, served in World War I  
*#6 Wounded Man (Autumn 1916, Bapaume): The War (Der Krieg)*  
*#12 Shock Troops Advance Under Gas: The War (Der Krieg)*  
*#14 Resting Company: The War (Der Krieg)*  
*#16 Corpse in Barbed Wire (Flanders): The War (Der Krieg)*  
*#19 Dance of Death 1917 (Dead Man Heights): The War (Der Krieg)*  
*#26 Dying Soldier: The War (Der Krieg)*  
1924, Selection from a portfolio of 51 etching, aquatint, and drypoint prints

Robert Morris, American (1931-2018), Army Corps of Engineers veteran, served during the Korean War  
*Untitled (Firestorm)*, 1982, Charcoal, ink, graphite, and airbrushed pigment on paper

Michael Kelley, American (1946-2011), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*Skull*, 1978, Graphite on paper

Ralph Arnold, American (1928-2006), Army veteran, served in the Korean War  
*Who You/Yeah Baby*, 1968, Collage and acrylic on canvas

Michael Kelley, American (1946 - 2011), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*The Count*, 1978, Oil on canvas

Mary Louise Sorrin (b. 1946), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*Tender Touch*, Circa 1990, Watercolor on paper

Cleveland Wright, American (1931 - 1992), Air Force veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*We Regret to Inform You*, 1979, Oil on canvas

Richard Olsen, American (b. 1935), Army veteran, served in the Vietnam War  
*Stand Solidly Now*, 1969, Etching

Amber Hoy, American (b. 1986), Army veteran, served in the Iraq War  
*Entrenched Series, Zero Target Data*, 2014, Screen print on paper targets

## OPEN/CLOSED

Fanny Garcia (b. 1990), Army veteran  
*After Dark Series*, 2018, Archival pigment prints

Cao Ba Minh (b. 1942), South Vietnamese Air Force veteran  
Title unknown, 1996, Acrylic on paper  
Title unknown, 1996, Acrylic on paper  
*Light*, 1997, Acrylic on paper

James Razko (b. 1987), Army National Guard veteran  
*Composition #1*, 2016, Oil on canvas  
*Composition #8*, 2016, Oil on canvas  
*Tile Composition #9*, 2016, Oil on canvas  
*Tile Composition #13*, 2016, Oil on canvas

Gerald Sheffield (b. 1985), Army veteran  
*Damatio Memoriae Americana*, 2017, Gesso on muslin  
*Untitled diptych (Contemplation)*, 2017, Two canvases with flashe on panel

Brandon Secrest (b. 1982) Navy veteran  
*Objectile*, 2018, Steel, brass, found object  
*Transfixed*, 2017, Wood, steel, cardboard  
*Transfinite*, 2017, Two digital photographs/foam core

Yeon J. Yue (b. 1987), Korean Air Force veteran  
*Grey American Landscape*, 2017, Twenty archival pigment prints

Karin Rodney-Haapala (b. 1978) U.S. Air Force veteran  
*OCD*, 2013, Archival pigment print  
*Incidents – OCD, Journal Entry*, 2013, Notebook paper mounted on foamcore  
*Nightmare*, 2013, Archival pigment print  
*Incidents – Nightmare, Journal Entry*, 2013, Notebook paper mounted on foamcore  
*Place*, 2013, Archival pigment print  
*Incidents – Place, Journal Entry*, 2013, Notebook paper mounted on foamcore  
*Seclusion*, 2013, Archival pigment print  
*Incidents – Seclusion, Journal Entry*, 2013, Notebook paper mounted on foamcore  
*Violence*, 2013, Archival pigment print  
*Violence Pt. 2*, 2013, Archival pigment print  
*Incidents- Journal Entry*, 2013, Notebook paper mounted on foamcore

## CONVERGENCE

Jessica Putnam-Phillips (b. 1973), Air Force veteran, served in the Middle East  
*Refuge*, 2019, 96 Clay and slip platters

Rodney Ewing (b. 1967), Army veteran, served in the Gulf War  
*Dry Season #1 Aftermath of a Civil Rights Protest*  
*Dry Season #2 Civil Rights Protest. Woman attacked by Water Cannon*  
*Dry Season #3 Civil Rights Protest. Protestors attacked by Water Cannon*  
*Dry Season #4 Civil Rights Protest. Protestors attacked by Water Cannon*  
*Dissident #1 Portrait of a Former Slave*  
*For Souls Triangle Trade: Slaves (Arms and Slaves)*  
*For Arms Triangle Trade: Slaves (Arms and Sugar)*  
2013, Ink and salt on paper

Ash Kyrie (b. 1980), Army National Guard veteran, served in the Iraq War  
*WATER*, 2019, Ceramic, colloidal silver, and plastic filters

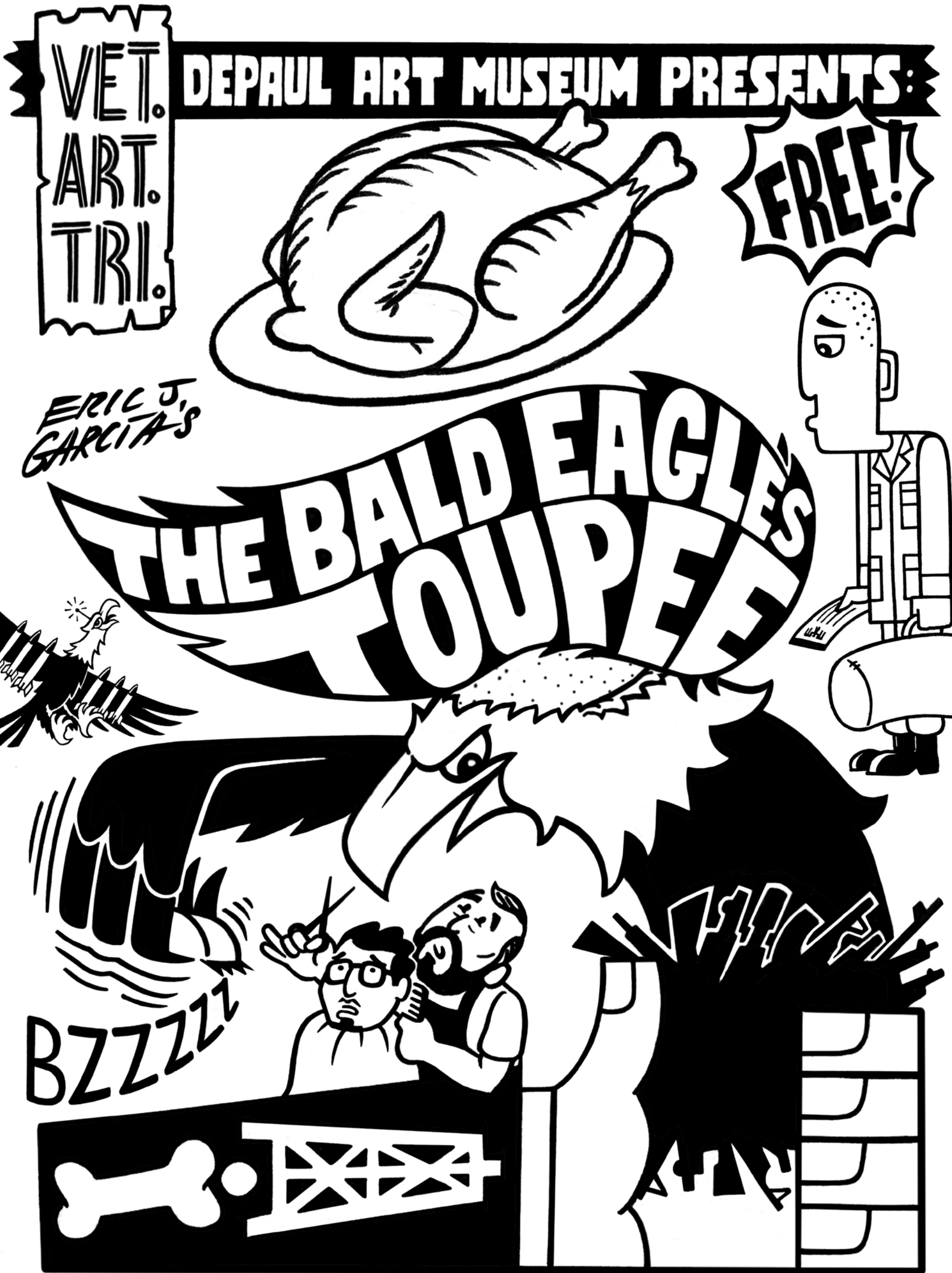
Ehren Tool (b. 1970), Marine Corps veteran, served in the Gulf War  
*Gun Violence Memorial Cups*, 2019, Clay and glaze

Hunter Atha (b. 1993), Fiber Artist, UIC Museum Studies Student  
*Unfiltered*, Dyed cotton muslin

## CONFLICT EXCHANGE

Alicia Dietz, American (b.1979), Army veteran, served in the Iraq War  
*Conflict Exchange: Cutting, Collaboration, and Conversation Round Table*, 2019, Live edge walnut  
A custom table that celebrates the second life of a tree while serving as a platform to cut uniforms for their second lives.

Drew Cameron, American (b.1982), Army veteran, served in the Iraq War  
*Combat Paper*, 2019, Handmade paper pulped from military uniforms



Eric J. Garcia, Publication cover for The Bald Eagle's Toupee, 2019.



Ehren Tool, *Gun Violence Memorial Cups*, 2019.

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